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Hoosiers

The race, religion, and ideology of sports

by Deborah Tudor

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HOOSIERS opens in transit as Norman Dale (Gene Hackman) drives through Indiana countryside in the early morning. His car approaches the camera and passes, the camera panning to follow him down a two-lane road to his new job as high school basketball coach.

Dale is going to Hickory Indiana, a place that cannot be found except by those who already know the way. "Hickory is so small," Myra Fleenor (Barbara Hershey) tells Dale, "that it doesn't even appear on most state maps." Hickory is a special place removed from the everyday world where normal conflicts are suppressed and race and class differences do not exist.

In Hickory, the fictional counterpart of Milan, Indiana, everyone is white and roughly equivalent in economic status.^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) In fact, unpainted houses and beat-up trucks indicate that Hickory may be a poor town, more so than neighboring cities. Coach Dale alludes to this possibility when he tells his players not to be distracted by an opposing team's fancy uniforms. This lack of class distinction along with apparent uniformity of religious belief creates an image of the residents as a group who share beliefs. Phrases like "the way we do things around here" and "things and people never change" dot the dialogue and indicate the timelessness of Hickory's culture.

Hickory signifies unspoiled innocence, an image of small-town United States. Many of the residents who own small businesses, a diner, a barbershop, a seed store or family farm are self-reliant, independent individuals. There is only one church shown, implying religious unity and the church building is used for a town meeting, indicating a close link between government and religion. The form of the meeting itself — one person, one vote — implies the ideal of participatory democracy. Hickory is the small town often invoked as the "real" United States: a group of hardworking people with equal say in the affairs of the community, working together under God. It is a well-ordered totally white universe.

HOOSIERS' plot is simple. Coach Norman Dale is fifty years old, banished from the NCAA for hitting a player. Hickory is virtually his last chance; he is unemployable anywhere else. As an outsider with different coaching techniques, he meets

opposition from the townfolk and especially from Myra Fleenor, the assistant principal. She fears that he will convince her student and former star player, Jimmy Chitwood, to rejoin the team instead of pursuing the academic course she has set up for him. The Huskers begin the season poorly and the town votes to dismiss Dale. Jimmy interrupts the voting to announce that he'll play, but only if Dale stays. Dale is immediately reinstated and his vindication is multiple. Not only does Hickory win the state title, but he is able to showcase Jimmy and win Myra's love. All this will occur before the final buzzer.

HOOSIERS is an engaging film. I saw the film first at a preview then at a suburban theatre. Both audiences cheered as the lovable Huskers won the state tournament. It would be hard not to cheer these underdogs from a small school or to cheer Dale's "comeback." HOOSIERS' heartwarming surface disguises the important work of the text: its demonstration of certain ideological operations of sports.

Sports and race

Before the Huskers meet the South Bend team in the state tournament final game, they play only all-white teams. The film is "realistic" here, the absence of blacks attributed to the setting: rural Indiana in 1951. Prior to the tournament, the only black face seen in the film is that of a black drummer in a high school pep band. This lack effectively pits our heroes, the all-white, rural Hickory Huskers against the urban, racially mixed South Bend Central Bears in the climactic game.

To read the absence of blacks as neutral or realistic ignores its signification in the context of current sports. Along with other forms of entertainment, sports provides a traditionally sanctioned means of upward mobility for black Americans. This myth however, works against black success in several ways. Black children who focus all their attention on athletics risk academic failure, and the odds against becoming another Michael Jordan are overwhelming. High school athletes who are not recruited for college often find this particular American dream is a dead end. Fastening all their hopes on sports as an escape deflects children from other career paths. The myth of upward mobility through athletics provides an unrealistic model for success, and so it becomes part of a mechanism which bars black children from more realistic goals. Simultaneously, the presence of so many successful black athletes perpetuates the image of an open society of equal opportunity. However, the percentage of athletes who make it from the playgrounds to the professional leagues is small.

Set in 1951, HOOSIERS takes place when integration in professional sports is just starting. It is only four years after the signing of Jackie Robinson by the Brooklyn Dodger organization and one year after the National Basketball Association drafted its first black players.[2] In professional baseball during the 1950s, there is evidence that an unspoken "gentlemen's agreement" existed, dictating the acceptable racial balance on the diamond. Four players out of nine was the approved ratio.[3] In the fifties, professional sports was a white man's club recently opened to a few blacks. Elevating a small number of black players to the major leagues allowed the white sports establishment to utilize previously unacceptable black talent while carefully controlling black entry into sports. This strategy avoided the appearance of absolute racism while slowing black entry into professional sports enough to prevent white fans' total alienation. In the eighties, professional black athletes are struggling to extend their rights to include

management and ownership.

HOOSIERS reduces the race issue to a climactic black-white game. Through dialogue, sound and framing, the text establishes the opposing team as a disruptive threat to the harmony and stability represented by the Huskers. An extremely percussive music track dominates the audio. The music's beat emphasizes the sound of the basketball hitting the floor. Crowd noise is distorted and mixed down to a low roar, creating a menacing sound. When the Bears, with their tall front line, take the floor, a long shot displays them full length, tall and powerful. The cut to this shot is synched to a single heavy percussion "beat." A reaction shot of Coach Dale follows. His facial expression indicates anxiety and awe; his eyes are wide and mouth slightly open. This two-shot sequence implies fear of the opponent, of their superior height and strength. The Bears look intimidating.

They do indeed intimidate the Huskers, dominating the boards and controlling the pace of the game. The Bears' control is clear in a shot where the Huskers miss a field goal. The frame is empty except for the ball bouncing off the rim of the basket. The only sound is the music track, with the beat synchronized to the basketball hitting the rim. In slow motion, two black arms enter the frame from below and grab the rebound. Immediately the audience knows the opponent has the ball.

The lack of racial integration on the Huskers and the absence of even one black opponent in previous tournament games creates a situation that pits the small town Davids against the big city Goliaths. The film devotes one scene to the fact that the Huskers are from such a small town that they've never seen a building taller than two stories. When they enter Butler Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, they are nervous about playing in such a big auditorium in front of a huge crowd. However, no mention is made of the fact that they will be playing a black team for the first time. The text totally suppresses this issue at a manifest level. However, analysis reveals that the text creates an image of the opposition as a menace, a threat.

Sports and religion

Textual links between religion and sports clearly place the support of the institution of religion behind the institution of sports in this "struggle." As he has for all the games, the minister leads a prayer and reads a text from the Bible. This time, he quotes the David and Goliath story, identifying "the philistine" with the Bears. Philistine, with its connotation of barbarian, evokes a threat to stable harmonious society. The use of this particular verse, while overtly justified by the respective sizes of the opposing towns and schools, magnifies the final game into a conflict between the rural white team embodying the values of a traditional small-town United States and the urban, racially mixed team.

Early in the film, Norman Dale arrives at Hickory High School, entering a foyer lighted by amber sunlight streaming through two windows in the back of the hall in a little alcove. This light is reflected by a highly polished wooden floor reminiscent of a basketball court. The school is hushed; classes are in session. A shelf above the alcove holds basketball trophies and game balls. The soft lighting and lack of noise create a reverential atmosphere like that of a church. The camera, placed in Norm's position, pans across these trophies.

Norm's meeting with some of the local men in the barbershop further underlines

the sports-religion connection. While shaking Norm's hand, the minister says that he knows Norm is a man with "high Christian morals who'll set a good example for the boys. Do you believe (pause) in a zone defense or man-to-man?" This question is uttered in a slightly emphasized "evangelical" tone of voice. The substitution of types of defenses for the expected phrase "the Lord" is funny and points out the equivalence between values like "decent and God-fearing" with belief in the value of certain basketball strategies. These points are equally important to the preacher. A belief in God and a belief in traditional basketball strategy are both highly desirable.

The town minister's involvement with the team goes deeper: his son Strap is on the team, he delivers locker room prayers before each game, and he drives the team bus to away games. Strap tells Norm that his father had a revelation from the Lord to paint his church bus red and gold (the Hickory colors) and drive the team. Norm starts to smile but as he looks at Strap, he realizes the boy is serious and tempers his amusement.

Religion also contributes to a Husker victory in the regional final game. Before entering the game as a substitute, Strap kneels in prayer on the sideline. He quickly scores two field goals, explaining: "I felt the power of the Lord." Through a handclasp, Strap transmits this power to Ollie, who shoots the game — winning free throws. Thus the institution of religion supports athletes and transmits a belief in a supernatural power that is on Hickory's side. Belief that the victory came from this power reinforces the correctness of the church's involvement in the team and justifies the faith of the believers in God, the institution and the values that it supports.

Sports as an industry

Hickory provides an unchanging isolated locale for the mutually supportive work of religion and sports. Myra Fleenor voices this quality of life in Hickory when she tells Dale that while she left Hickory to attend college and graduate school, she returned:

"Father always said I'd come back ... it's a place where things never change ... where people never change ... it makes you feel real secure."

This security provides a stable place for "pure" athletics, free from economic and industrial concerns.

Athletics exists in tension between the concepts of sports as a "pure" endeavor, a "real" accomplishment and the reality of sports as part of the entertainment industry. Even at college and high school levels, designated places of amateur play, sports is commodified. College recruiting is a high-pressure, hard-sell business practice. With some exceptions, college recruiting has depended upon perks to sway undecided athletes. Extra money, cars, and sexual favors have been offered as bait. The recent recruiting scandal at Southern Methodist University is an example. This "seamier" side of athletics is at odds with its image of purity.

But Hickory insulates its amateur athletes from the business side of basketball. Norm Dale asks Myra Fleenor why a basketball scholarship isn't feasible for Jimmy. She responds that nothing ever comes to Hickory. No recruiters will see

Jimmy play, eliminating his chances to compete for athletic scholarships. Jimmy's talents exist outside the athletic career track, endowing his play with dual meanings. Jimmy plays for the pure enjoyment of sports, not as a means to an end. However, basketball is a dead end for Jimmy, the "glory days" of his youth.

Ideology of athletics

Isolated from the economic, race and class issues, HOOSIERS resolves several pairs of contradictory values appropriated from the discourse of athletics. With other institutions, athletics works to reproduce dominant cultural values while simultaneously eradicating any conflict arising from the fact that several of these values oppose each other. Antimonies like natural talent versus hard work, individuality versus team identity and competition/winning versus sportsmanship exist in the everyday discourse of both professional and amateur sports. Taken separately, these qualities are values in the Western personality. However, any one of them poses a potential threat to cultural harmony is pushed beyond a certain limit.

Casting these attributes into pairs contains their subversive potential. These sets of paired opposites form a large part of the ideology of athletics. For instance, winning is valorized by sporting institutions but not at the expense of sportsmanlike behavior (at least in public). Individual excellence is rewarded as long as it does not obstruct team effort. Thus, a basketball team's best shot is censured for failing to pass off to a teammate with better position to make a crucial basket. A naturally talented athlete, called a "phenom" is a valuable asset, but if he is unwilling to work hard, then he will "fail to live up to his potential." Discourses of the institutions surrounding sports such as broadcast and print journalism, constantly re-establish these paired contradictions as qualities that are inherently "athletic."

Cutting across these sets of antimonies is the opposition of orthodoxy-heterodoxy, which subsumes all these pairs. The work of sports in culture creates unity in the field of endeavor by smoothing out the appearance of heterodoxy. Individual differences in the practice of athletic concepts are suppressed. Professional baseball umpires conceptualize the strike zone differently. These slight variations of the rulebook strike zone apparently constitute an unfair obstacle to players. This could be seen as an example of "individualism" defeating the rules governing the play of the game, as it introduces the element of arbitrariness into a well-regulated universe. However such variations are suppressed by the discourse of the game. Throughout the game, sportscasters remind the audience that, although different umpires call balls and strikes differently, each calls them consistently that way. Therefore, learning the umpires becomes another facet of the game for the players to master. This lack of uniformity is disguised as the "human element" of the game. Thus, individualism is institutionalized within the discourse of the sport.

Individual vs. team play

One of the most prominent antimonies of athletics is individual versus team play. The points of view of announcers, managers, coaches and players are often encoded in various clichés. Statements that valorize the worth of the individual are: "One man can make the difference between winning and losing," or "This man is the franchise." Keeping individual statistics such as points, assists, field goals, etc.,

validate individual play and reward it with honors such as Most Valuable Player and contract monies.

However, should a player carry his quest for personal excellence too far, he is quickly censured. An athlete who plays for his own stats is deplored. Even though individual excellence is rewarded, a player must simultaneously be a team person. He must play within the team's system, or he will most like be traded for someone who does. Incorporating the individual players into the team presents itself as a situation that benefits both "star" player and the rest of the team.

Natural talent versus hard work

HOOSIERS uses the figure of Jimmy Chitwood to resolve this contradiction and secondly that of natural talent versus hard work. Natural talent is the quality that determines if a player becomes one of the elite, the athlete-hero. This attribute expresses itself in truisms like "He has a natural shot" or "You can't teach quickness." However, natural talent will only carry its possessor a certain distance. Hard work must turn raw talent into polished, mature play. For a season or two, the excuse, "These are the mistakes of youth," will cover the athlete's failings. However, if he lacks the ability to work hard, he will be dismissed in a few years. On the other hand, an athlete who works hard without the benefit of exceptional natural skills will be commended for "making the best of his talent," for "fighting his way into the lineup" by taking extra batting practice or extra scrimmage. The limit placed on natural talent's value by the value of hard work assures the mass of people who are spectators that even though they lack the gifts of Magic Johnson they could have an opportunity to be a big time athlete. Sports promotes an elite class of heroes while claiming at the same time that really, anyone could join this privileged class through hard work and dedication. This image, of course, denies the restrictions that exist on entering professional sports.

Although Jimmy Chitwood is the town's outstanding shot, he refuses to play for personal reasons. Fatherless, he mourns the death of Dale's predecessor who was "like a father" to him. Jimmy's mother is an invalid and Myra Fleenor helps take care of him. She tells Dale that "she and Jimmy have decided that it would be best for him not to play ball." However the students and townfolk feel Jimmy must play if the Huskers are to be competitive. The Hickory principal, Cletus (Sheb Wooley) tells Norm that everyone feels Jimmy is necessary. Dale replies with a sports truism that denies the value of the individual: "No one is irreplaceable." In this scene and several others, Dale asserts that basketball is a team sport with much more to it than just shooting.

During the pre-season pep rally, the students begin to chant, "Jimmy, Jimmy" after the team is introduced. Dale takes the microphone and chastises them, stating that these boys are "their team" and they deserve the school's support. Here Dale asserts the reciprocity of school athletics. The players work, sacrificing personal time to give the student body (and the town) a team to support. The non-players must recognize this to validate the players as their team. The implication here is that the boys play for the team, the school and the town, not for individual recognition.

Dale's practice sessions stress the teamwork necessary to set up good shots and play good defense. This strategy which often has the boys practice drills without the

ball, directly contradicts the style of the "old coach," whose practices were more or less scrimmages and who subscribed to the "run and gun" style of play.

Jimmy as structuring absence

Jimmy is the epitome of the silent loner. He is first seen alone in the gymnasium, shooting baskets. When Cletus tries to introduce Norm Dale, Jimmy just looks at him without speaking. In fact, Jimmy speaks only twice during the film. However he is constantly spoken about: by Myra, Dale and the residents. His screen time is limited as well, but his off-screen presence structures many scenes where he is physically absent. During that pep rally, he is absent as the students chant his name. He watches practice occasionally, peeking through the gym door. He shoots baskets alone. He is not integrated into Hickory society. Although Jimmy is outside Hickory, he is the focus of much of the text. He integrates Norm Dale into Hickory and is the initial catalyst for the relationship between Norm and Myra Fleenor.

Myra Fleenor wants Jimmy to escape small town life. Her point of view opposes that of Norm Dale, that of the townsfolk and that of the film. She does not want Jimmy to be like Norm, "coaching in Hickory when he's fifty." Myra wants Jimmy to succeed in a career that will endure. She derides the notion of the athlete-hero, saying,

"Heroes come pretty cheap around here ... if you can put a ball through an iron hoop, people treat you like a god."

Dale replies that most people would kill for the chance to be a god if only for a moment. Although the text vindicates Dale's point of view about sports, it does provide elements that contradict this view. However, all these contradictions are neatly resolved before the final game.

The character of Shooter (Dennis Hopper) supports Myra's point of view. He is an alcoholic ex-Hickory player whose son Everett now plays for Dale. Shooter is a bum, begging small change and launching into stories of his playing days. Although he is unsuccessful in life, Shooter really does have a good mind for basketball. He understands the game and has an encyclopedic knowledge of the teams in the region. After Cletus suffers a heart attack, Norm gives Shooter a chance to coach. Through this experience, Shooter regains his self-respect, the love of his son, and the strength to enter a hospital to dry out. Sports may have sidetracked Shooter, but it is his ultimate salvation that reconnects him to life. Basketball is a clear inspiration for Shooter's redemption; this mitigates Myra Fleenor's anti-athletic viewpoint.

Dale at first observes Myra's admonition to leave Jimmy alone. However he talks to Jimmy, who is shooting baskets alone outside the school. An establishing shot "proves" that the youth can indeed shoot; he makes several baskets in a row. As Jimmy shoots, Dale tells him that his talent is his own and that he doesn't care if Jimmy plays or not. Jimmy gives little acknowledgement of Dale's presence, except to miss a shot as he leaves. This break in his equilibrium is quickly restored; Jimmy returns to shooting a string of baskets.

Jimmy, silent, alone in the frame, not only represents the individual but the natural. Norm's final statement to Jimmy indicates that he adheres to his "no one

is irreplaceable" dictum. However, Norm's speech can be read as a deliberate attempt to upset Jimmy, to break through his reserve. Contrasted to Myra's highly directive speech about Jimmy's future, Norm's speech seems ambiguous, apparently leaving Jimmy freedom of choice. The mention of Myra, however, indicates that Norm wants Jimmy to consider a choice other than her goals for him.

"Let's do it coach's way"

At this point in the narrative, the Huskers are losing games. The text justifies these losses by pointing out that the team members refuse to follow Norm's game plan. In the locker room following a loss, one player tells his mates, "Let's do it Coach's way." At this point, it is not the lack of Jimmy's natural talent but the failure of obedience to authority that costs Hickory games. The team does not want the work of following Norm's plan and reverts to old style play.

Ray breaches Norm's rule of four passes before shooting, scoring a few quick points but destroying the game plan. Norm benches him, even though the field goals narrowed the deficit and may eventually have rallied the team to win. Winning is important but only if accomplished within the system established by rightful authority. The team loses until Jimmy's return. However, the above justification mitigates the importance of the individual, the natural, for winning by stating that winning comes from disciplined team play.

The text also asserts the importance of the individual, however. Despite his assertions to the contrary, Coach Dale credits some of his team's resurgence to Jimmy: "With Jimmy, we've come together, all pistons are firing." This statement resembles sportscasters' references to the "X effect." "X" is one athlete of stellar quality whose presence in the lineup coincides with an upswing of team fortunes. Like other truisms, this one has glaring exceptions. Despite the addition of superstar Andre Dawson to the lineup, the Chicago Cubs finished the 1987 season in last place in the National League Eastern Division. One man may make a difference but only in the presence of other conditions.

Dale's statement about his new lineup reconciles the two elements of individual play and team effort. After all, no matter how good Jimmy is, he cannot compete without a team. No glory accrues to sandlot players. Although Norm overtly states that Jimmy's talents are his own, the film denies this and defines Jimmy's talents as rightfully used in the service of the school and the town. People may possess the right to do as they please with their talents. However, society pushes people into situations where their talents are at the disposal of the community, to be consumed by others. Natural talent gets no reward; natural talent developed through hard work under an acceptable culturally appointed authority figure garners considerable returns. Fame, honor and for professionals, money — all these belong to the naturally talented individual who yields to group needs and is successfully integrated into the team, and by extension, society.

Sport as socializing force

The importance of school and school athletic programs as socializing institutions lies in their ability to channel the students into structured activities that reproduce dominant values. From earliest school days, playtime is directed; it is structured

into "recess" periods supervised by teachers. Play changes over the course of school years from nonhierarchical participatory activity performed for its own sake to intramural and/or competitive sports. Free play, according to Stanley Aronowitz, can break the activity that reproduces dominant values; it contains the potential for subversion of values. Therefore it is discouraged.[4]

Athletic programs differ from play; they are hierarchical. Participants follow rules, obey coaches.

"Play is an activity that human beings create in which the person sees him or herself in the object produced. It presupposes equality ... we play neither with inferiors or superiors; we play with our equals" (p. 62).

Sports also divides the worlds into players and spectators. Spectatorship becomes an increasingly large mode of activity within the world. Since sports programs are limited by funds and time, only a small number of students participate; the rest watch. The effect of spectatorship is that spectators forget that their actions create the world; instead, they begin to see the world as created for them to consume (p. 67). Sports programs then affect non-participants by helping to condition them to spectatorship as a way of living. They become objects acted upon rather than active subjects in the world.

The figure of Jimmy, which is integrated into the team and community, also exemplifies the athlete as valued commodity. He is quiet and obedient (except in the final game where he disagrees with Dale). He is not a "hot dog" on the court. He plays within Dale's strategy. His presence on the team coincides with better days for the teams, and the town's unified support around the Huskers is assured. Norm Dale's position within the community is also stabilized.

Dale's unorthodox coaching methods contradict local basketball wisdom. The town distrusts him from the beginning; some of them openly question Cletus' decision to hire him. Dale further defies local custom by closing practices and dismissing a local man who wants to assist him. Banning spectators from practices raises the question of control over the team, who are sons and neighbors of the residents. Hickory feels close identification with and heavy investment in the team. They want the Huskers to stabilize things, to ensure that the town's way of life remains as it is. Dale threatens this role, but he also embodies the icon of "head coach" as ultimate authority over the team and its conditions of existence.

Dale does have backers among the residents however, such as Paul Butcher. His son Buddy was kicked off the team by Dale, and Paul brings him back to apologize. Butcher also clears the gym of onlookers, demonstrating his faith in the rightful authority of the man occupying the position of head coach.

Dale's team loses the first two games and the town's unhappiness grows. The conflict between Dale and Hickory leads to a referendum on his suitability to coach. The vote goes against Dale (68-45). As the votes are being tallied, Jimmy enters the church. He approaches the podium and asks to speak. He tells the assembled folks, "I don't know if it'll make any difference, but I figure it's about time I started playing." The crowd cheers. However, Jimmy adds, "I play only if Coach stays." Dale wins a quick re-vote by a large show of hands.

Coach Dale's victory also valorizes the importance of the naturally talented individual and emphasizes the importance of winning, even at partial loss of control over the team. This is a delicate balance. The town wants the Huskers to remain the way they want but also wants a winning team. It's important that the Huskers be an institution that reproduces the town's values, the stability referred to by Myra. However, it is vital that they win, and they believe that one person, Jimmy, will make the difference. Therefore, they will tolerate Norm Dale and their fear of loss of control.

Women, sports, romance

Jimmy also provides the impetus for Norm and Myra's relationship, which begins in conflict over him. Myra's views on Jimmy and sports pit her against Norm. It also makes her somewhat of an outsider in Hickory. As a teacher, she attends pep rallies and games but does not "boost" the team in any extraordinary way. In fact, she does not subscribe at all to notions of the value of sports. Rather, she views sports as a sidetrack, which blinds participants and spectator alike to other more lasting achievements. HOOSIERS positions Myra as an outsider in several ways: she is often framed alone, as she keeps to herself and is unfriendly to Dale, the protagonist. She left Hickory but returned, speaking glowingly about its lack of change.

She tells Dale about basketball's importance in her childhood. Her mother was so involved with her brother's playing that the mother lost sleep before and after game days. But unlike her mother, Myra cannot understand what all the fuss was about. Opal Fleenor accepts athletics as an important part of small town life and family life as well. An enthusiastic Hickory booster, she is friendly to Dale and invites him over for supper and cuts his hair. This is in contrast to Myra, who speaks to Dale only when necessary. Opal is warm and folksy — much like the common image of small town residents. More pointedly, she accepts easily the position that team athletics gives to women: mother, spectator, cheerleader, booster. She is unable to convert Myra, who wonders why "nothing I ever did was as important" as her brother's basketball playing.

Myra's portrayal in the film makes her point of view unattractive. She is a harsh character compared to good ole Norm, whose dry wit and easy ability to handle bad situations make him a sympathetic protagonist. Myra is suspicious and unfriendly; she digs up Norm's past and discovers the NCAA ban. Her body and facial gestures are very stiff and controlled; her clothing and hairstyle are severe and prim. When she speaks, her mouth is drawn into a harsh, straight line. Barely controlled anger exists in the undertones of her voice. As a woman spectator, I responded positively to Myra's independence. However, I think that the a more general reading of Myra would be as a sexually repressed woman, who, if she would let Norm Dale make love to her, would relax and realize the importance of sports and a woman's place in the world. Indeed, this is what happens.

Myra is also an outsider precisely because she is a woman. An integral part of the U.S. notion of team sports is that of the father passing the torch to a son. Sports texts contain many examples of the importance of the father-son sports bond. In THE NATURAL, Roy Hobbs' knowledge of his son's existence gives him the strength to hit the climactic home run. As Rob Silberman observed:

"We all know if, at the end, he'd been told he had a daughter, he probably would have hit a single at best instead of a home run." [5]

The literary discourse of sports history also provides examples. Ex-Brooklyn Dodger shortstop Peewee Reese expressed his disappointment at having only daughters: "I must be shooting blanks," he told writer Roger Kahn. [6]

Myra's attempt to be Jimmy's mentor and lure him from the basketball court disrupts the traditional pattern of father-son bonding in athletics. Myra cannot occupy the place of the father. This disruption is smoothed over when Jimmy accepts Norm and rejoins the team.

Myra's relation to sports is crucial to the text. She voices many of the unattractive aspects of sports. Much of what she says is a rational critique of the overwhelming emphasis placed on sports at the expense of other types of achievement. However, this critique is undercut by the film's harsh portrayal of her and her suspicious denial of Norm. "I know all about men like you," she tells him early in the film. Her struggle with Norm over Jimmy can be read as based on jealousy rather than on concern for Jimmy's future.

However as the story progresses, Myra converts to Norm's point of view. She expresses admiration for his "noble experiment" with Shooter and for his courage in following his convictions about coaching. The conventions of Hollywood romance also operate here: initial dislike often masks "real love" and evaporates in the face of undeniable attraction. A series of reaction shots of Myra's face displays her gradual change. The hard lines around her mouth vanish; her face becomes softer in expression. At the climactic game, Myra becomes the supportive woman in the bleachers, nervous at the game's progress. When the Huskers win the title, Myra and Opal embrace for the first time. The end of the game has Myra and Norm beaming at each other. Norm has won Myra's heart and her support.

A moment of godhood

The final game also gives Norm a chance to repay Jimmy for saving his job. Down by one point, with twenty seconds remaining, Norm decides to use Jimmy as a decoy and have another player take the final shot. The well-disciplined Huskers balk at this. Jimmy speaks only for the second time in the film. He looks at Norm and says, "I can make it." Norm hesitates only a second before agreeing. This allows Jimmy to make the final jump shot that wins the game. It is his moment of "godhood" spoken of earlier by Norm, and his chances of being recruited increase.

***Hoosiers'* nostalgia**

HOOSIERS offers a nostalgic look at a time when, it is widely believed, Americans held a set of common values. The myth of white domination was largely unchallenged, at least in the imaginative memory of the 1980s. Women were traditional conventional supporters of the active man's quest for success. In short, HOOSIERS is a retrospective fantasy about a time and place where societal problems do not exist. People like Myra Fleenor who challenge the system of values simply do not have the power to withstand the recuperative force of dominant culture. Athletics, religion and romantic love combine in a formidable "natural" order. Like the playing field, Hickory constitutes a privileged space where the

"political issues" of a culture that creates and consumes athletics to maintain itself are suppressed. Since sports is often read as a simple metaphor for the state of society, the lack of racial and class distinctions can be read as an indication that society at large is also classless and unproblematic. HOOSIERS allows filmgoers in the 1980s a breather, a timeout from an increasingly puzzling relationship of sports to culture. Denial of the "political" nature of athletics is widespread even in the face of the current attention on the biased hiring practices of professional sports. Driving to Hickory, along with Norm Dale, the spectator leaves all this behind and revisits an uncomplicated vision of patriarchal white United States.

NOTES

1. The Milan Indians won the Indiana High School state title in 1954. With an enrollment of 160, they were the smallest school to win the one-class Indiana state tournament in the modern era. Don Snider, "The Real HOOSIERS Story," *The Chicago Sun-Times*, March 1, 1987, p. 119.
2. The 1950-51 National Basketball Association season featured the first black professional players. The New York Knicks obtained Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton from the Harlem Globetrotters and the Boston Celtics drafted Chuck Cooper of Duquesne. Zander Hollander, ed., *The Modern Encyclopedia of Basketball*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Four Winds Press, 1973).
3. Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 172.
4. Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 69.
5. Rob Silberman, "THE NATURAL — Mr. Smith Goes to the Ballpark," *JUMP CUT*, No. 31 (1986), pp. 5-6.
6. Kahn, op. cit., p. 169.

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Miami Vice

Sex and drugs and rock & roll in the TV market

by ONC Wang

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The discourses of VICE

Three discourses dominate the TV show MIAMI VICE, and account for its popularity. The subtitle of Emily Benedek's 1985 *Rolling Stone* article on MIAMI VICE identifies the three discourses thus: "Sex and drugs and rock & roll ambush primetime TV." [1] [[open notes in new window](#)] In 1985, that subtitle seemed to date *Rolling Stone*, MIAMI VICE, and their conceptions of the cutting edge. Sex and drugs and rock & roll had finally hit mainstream U.S. television, after they had hit the rest of the United States for the last twenty odd years. In 1987, the libidinal promise of Benedek's subtitle has, eerily enough, taken on an unexpected relevancy. Because of such phenomena as the politics of AIDS, Nancy Reagan's saying "No" to drugs, and Nike's using the Beatles' "Revolution" to sell their shoes, people are once again debating what is at stake in sex and drugs and rock & roll: what sex and drugs and rock & roll *mean*. [2]

In this article, I examine MIAMI VICE's answer to that debate. Most of my examples come from the show's first season, the fall of 1984 to the spring of 1985. As we shall see, the trends of that first season have since come to appear in many other areas of U.S. mass culture. These trends challenge leftists and progressives in a way we cannot ignore. While we fight with the far right for basic constitutional rights about our privacy and our bodies, we must simultaneously distinguish our own vocabularies for libidinal pleasure from late capitalism's own versions of sex and drugs and rock & roll. To make such distinctions is not always easy; at times it may seem impossible, except through a dialectical critique. At other times, however, the choice, like other issues in this country, is all too clear. First, then consider...

Sex and VICE

"Relax, don't do it, when you want to come."

— "Frankie Goes to Hollywood"

This song of indeterminate sexual practice, played by a band whose gay affiliations are part of its spectacle, accompanies the opening shots of one MIAMI VICE episode. The song's rhythm is hypnotic, with its one lyric repeating and folding in upon itself again and again. The scene is a heroin shooting gallery, with the room bathed in lurid neon colors. What, however, is narrated in these opening shots? The show's two female cops, Gina and Trudy, have just infiltrated the shooting gallery as junkies. They are without backup because MIAMI VICE's main protagonists, Sonny Crockett and Ricardo Tubbs, have conveniently lost them in traffic. In order not to blow their cover, the two women must accept the head pusher's open offer of drugs and intimidated demand for sex. Just as they seem to acquiesce, they instead pull out their guns in perfect synchronization to the music, the lurid neon lights, and the unexpected arrival of the show's two heroes. The music breaks off, replaced by the sound of *very* loud gunfire.

This episode has, in effect, transformed the signifiers of transgression into those of titillation. The subversive power of Frankie's transgression against heterosexual propriety now merely becomes mood music for one commonplace male heterosexual narrative of titillation, the possibility of women made helpless and submissive by drugs. That the women turn out *not* to be helpless only shows how the scene titillates and then represses the fantasy it has given the audience. Indeed, we will see this formula of titillation/ repression occurring again and again in the show.

For, like the most vociferous Jonathan Edwards sermon, the eradication of vice on MIAMI VICE is intrinsically linked with its graphic exposure/ exploitation. As its title suggests, the show is not only about Miami's Vice squad, but about vice in Miami. Another way of putting this is that cop shows attract us not by the representation of norms, but by norms' disturbance and rectification; not because of the law, but because of crime *and* its punishment. Other genres, like horror and gangster films, also use a version of disturbance and rectification in their narratives, when they portray an evil that is then stamped out. In horror films, however, the evil is oftentimes a fear that must be confronted, if not exorcised. Thus David Cronenberg's films explore the suspicion that the human body and its biological functions are the site of nausea and monstrosity.

In contrast, cop shows and gangster films often explicitly portray evil as a desire — a vice — that is prohibited by the law. The disturbance by, and the rectification of, a vice is thus the way the cop show — and MIAMI VICE especially allows the viewer to indulge in what the show defines as vice. The dynamics among disturbance, rectification, exposure, and exploitation also create a spiral effect, an ongoing self-regeneration of titillation, repression, and titillation. Visually, the bikini-straps and other string-like garments for the body that proliferate within MIAMI VICE mark out the terrain that may be exploited forever, since it will never be fully unclothed.

Simultaneously, the definition of vice itself works under a set of thematic prohibitions. As the episode that used "Frankie Goes to Hollywood" shows, the discourse of sex that saturates MIAMI VICE remains safely inscribed within the boundaries of patriarchal heterosexuality. "Evan," the only episode in MIAMI VICE's first year that dealt with homosexuality directly, safely defuses the issue by turning it into a drama of male heterosexual bonding, where Evan and Sonny are detectives haunted by the death of a mutual friend. This show distinguishes

between male friendship and loyalty and male sexual love, with the latter portrayed as a forgivable sin, and the former termed as existential necessities. Evan's own crime, then, is not so much his homophobia as the fact that he let his homophobia override his loyalty to his gay partner, who, then distraught, died in a suicidal bust. Sonny, guilty of the same crime to a lesser degree, is saved by his "authentic" relationship with his new partner, Tubbs. Sonny's confession of his feelings to Tubbs constitutes a healthy male bonding that contrasts with Evan's tortured alienation from the male community. While Sonny still works with a partner, Evan now works as a solo undercover cop. Sonny's confession also overrides male/female relationships, since Tubbs must leave his beautiful pickup at a singles bar in order to find out what's bothering Sonny.

The final shootout of the show portrays Evan's death scene in a slow motion ballet style, reminiscent of the master of violent male bonding, Sam Peckinpah. The scene makes no narrative sense whatsoever, except as an unveiling of the psychological underpinnings to the relationships between Evan, Sonny and Tubbs. The final shot focuses on Sonny holding a dying Evan in his arms. As Evan finishes speaking ("It's your turn next, Sonny."), Tubbs appears from the right side of the screen; the shot freezes and the credits roll. Perhaps Evan's last words problematize what will survive him, the relationship between Tubbs and Crockett. They and their bond *do* survive him, however, as Tubbs' appearance on the screen makes clear. Most importantly, they also survive the now totally marginalized cause of this episode, the cop with the "problematic" sexuality. Thus the show reiterates and preserves the primary building block of institutional law enforcement — and thus of the institution: male heterosexual partnership.[3]

But why is MIAMI VICE inscribed within the boundaries of *patriarchal* heterosexuality? The show certainly fetishizes Crockett and Tubbs as sexual objects as much as the female bodies it flashes across the screen. The cheesecake photos of the actors portraying Sonny and Ricardo in *Rolling Stone* make that clear. Yet unlike the women in the show, Crockett and Tubbs' sexuality does not confine itself to their physical bodies, nor even to the style of their clothes (though a large part does reside there). Rather, it disseminates itself along every aspect of their character makeup — from how they argue with the bureaucracy on the telephone, to the way they drive their sports cars (usually a Ferrari the first year), to how they act streetwise with their stoolies, to how they blow away their enemies with state-of-the-art weaponry. Paradoxically, and again unlike the women in the show, Sonny's and Ricardo's subjectivities are neither evaluated solely by nor inscribed solely within their bodies. They are always "more" than mere sexual creatures: more of a cop, more of a partner, more of an individualist bucking the system. By thus having male self and sexuality relate in such a varied manner, MIAMI VICE announces itself as a narrative of patriarchy.

Perhaps the most subtle reinforcement of racial hierarchy in the show relates to these sexual dynamics. Only Tubbs, the black cop, did extended bedroom scenes the first year of the show. This is no small point, as they are given as much music, time and choreography as any other part of the show. Since MIAMI VICE's first season, Sonny *has* done a bedroom scene; I still believe, however, that the show visually emphasizes Tubbs' sexuality more. This emphasis has flowered into the surreal: witness, in the show's second season opener, Philip Michael Thomas' (aka Tubbs) and Pam Grier's extended foot sex scene. Much less than the women

characters, but still more than his white counterpart, Tubbs is defined by — and thus confined to — sexual display of his body.

Still, it is the woman who becomes most confined to her body in the show. She seems an alien within her own home, as her body stands first and foremost as the site of male pleasure. Next to drug smuggling, female (not male) prostitution represents the largest vice on MIAMI VICE.

Again, the same formula of titillation/repression that we saw in the Frankie episode operates here, as the very representation of the prohibition and punishment of prostitution fetishizes all the accoutrements of that trade (the prostitute's clothing and make-up, their bodies, the black wet streets they walk upon, the motel rooms in which they conduct their business) and offers them up as entertainment. Thus the use of prostitute humor on the show seems not so much a liberal attitude as an interested strategy that increases the opportunity for titillation through accommodation and tolerance. Moreover, the prostitute merely repeats thematically the main function of all women on the show, i.e., to serve the male gaze of the audience.[4]

MIAMI VICE's opening establishes this function every week, with its shot of the front row of gleaming Rolls Royces soon followed by one of the backs and buttocks of two young, bikini-clad women. Pleasure and property, flesh and wealth, all conflate. I observed earlier how Crockett's and Tubbs' sexuality disseminates itself through all aspects of their lifestyle. One can further note that much of this dissemination deals with their interaction with the material world: e.g., their sports cars, motorboats, and Sonny's golden Rolex. That there is a definite sexual charge to this interaction might shed a light on one level of their interaction with the women of the show. One wonders, in other words, whether sparks fly because the women are women, or because they are just another category of stylistic props. Does the women's sexuality turn them into objects to be possessed, or is the perception of them as commodity objects the reason for their sexuality? The representation of conspicuous consumption on MIAMI VICE trivializes the distinction between these two questions. Both the Rolls Royce and the woman's body stand as sites of male pleasure that can be obtained in the same way.

These dynamics map onto Trudy and Gina, the two supporting female police characters, in a more complex manner. Because of their detective prowess, martial arts ability, and confidence with guns, both female cops are much more empowered than other women on the show. Yet, at the beginning of the show's first season, an even more startling trait marked the difference between them and MIAMI VICE's other women. Trudy and Gina wore little make-up and dressed plainly except when they went undercover as prostitutes. The juxtaposition between their undercover and "real" selves was predictable. What was more jarring was the disjunction between them and the rest of the show's universe — or, more precisely, the *expectations* of that universe. The lack of any decoration upon their bodies called attention to the incredible style lavished on everything else (most obviously, on the other women) in the show. At that point in the season, Gina and Trudy seemed unique in that they had to go "undercover" to take on the signifiers of a discourse — the commodification of the female body — that the representation of other women on the show openly valorized and fetishized.

Halfway through the first season the gap between Gina and Trudy and the other

women began to close: someone decided to change policy and both female cops became more glamorous. This was especially true of Gina, the white cop. Towards the end of the first season, one episode revolved around how Gina, posing as a hooker, had to sleep with a gangland boss. Lee Saudin's review of MIAMI VICE waxed enthusiastic over the episode, claiming a taboo had been broken, insofar as TV had always before considered such women undercover cops safe from sexual harm.[5] If this episode did disturb such a fantasy, did it have that as its only intention and consequence? What Saudin took for a radical, cultural disturbance also repeated one basic service of MIAMI VICE, the possession of the female body as a site of male pleasure. As Saudin noted, the actual possession of Gina by the mob boss happened off-screen. This did not interfere, however, with the TV audience's more important possession and consumption of the onscreen images of Gina — as hooker.[6]

Other episodes with other women establish this service more blatantly. In one, an opening scene that looks disturbingly like a porno flick turns out to be the filming of a porno flick. Even more so than when Gina is working as an undercover hooker, this episode's disjunction between appearance and reality, between porn and TV actress, only serves to emphasize how in the larger context of the male gaze and the female object, the TV audience and the TV show, there is no disjunction at all.

The drugs of VICE

"It's the lure of easy money
It's got a very strong appeal."
— Glen Frey, "Smuggler's Blues"

For the last two decades U.S. recreational drug culture could prove its difference from the rest of society by pointing to the mass media's laughable misrepresentation of drug use. Indeed, the drug culture lovingly adopted such representations as part of its own canon of *weirdo Americana exotica*. Why turn to Ralph Steadman's portraits of lizard businessmen when the businessmen themselves produced such classic distortions of reality as MARIJUANA: THE KILLER WEED or the DRAGNET episode where Sgt. Friday busts an acid party? DRAGNET was delightfully ludicrous in that its stereotypical signs for drug activity seemed so obviously the property of the dominant "straight" culture's imagination: e.g., the Prince Valiant "hippie" hairdos, the Nehru jackets, and the sitar muzak. MIAMI VICE has, however, changed this relation between drug and mass culture. For the first time on primetime TV, the signs of drug consumption are actually those of the drug culture, where MIAMI VICE's drug discourse coincides to a large degree with the same stylistic and imagistic vocabulary — e.g., coke mirrors, rock & roll, and MTV pyrotechnics — used by the drug culture to define itself.

"To a large degree" becomes an important qualification since MIAMI VICE's drug discourse discriminates in the sense that it is primarily the language of cocaine. Thematically the cocaine smugglers outnumber both heroin and pot dealers on the show. The stylistic dynamics are more complex since the signifiers of cocaine — the mirror, fast cars, sleek visual style, beautiful dazed models — also represent part of the discourse of opulent consumption in which cocaine itself forms another sign. Cocaine and wealth speak the same language, as cocaine remains the drug one can spend the most money on in the shortest period of time. It thus becomes the perfect allegory for opulent waste, consumer excess, and hyperbolic living in our

culture's fast lanes.

And what is the "fast lane" — or even more overtly, the "fast track" — but another allegory for the most intense existence possible offered to us by our culture at any given time? The metaphoric associations of cocaine are those most in line with an acceptance of economic and cultural life under capitalism. No other drug works as well. Heroin becomes too debilitating, antisocial, and is much more class restricted, while marijuana has too many passive associations — one cannot be "laid back" in the "fast lane." And acid, the drug most absent from *MIAMI VICE*, has the unfortunate, anarchic habit of causing states of consciousness that deny (or fantasize the denial of) the metaphysical rules of the status quo. Only alcohol saturates the world of business more. Though ubiquitous, its role as the businessman's ever faithful prop — the "martini lunch" — never varies.

Cocaine, on the other hand, occupies many different positions in the discourse of wealth at once. As an industry, a consumer product, the ultimate currency, and signifier of class lifestyle, cocaine is the perfect caricature of the actual force of capitalism driving us in daily life. To conduct business at the largest volume possible in the shortest time necessary, so that one can spend as much as one can as quickly as one can — is that not the perfect description of the big coke deal? Is that not also the ultimate capitalist fantasy — abundant wealth creating more wealth all in the time it takes to exchange two suitcases in a seamy bar?[7]

Are we then supposed to consider the cocaine smugglers on *MIAMI VICE* as not only the new bootleggers of the eighties, but also the archetypal capitalist entrepreneurs of our time? How do we then reconcile their violent, bloody lifestyles with such a view? Is there then an implicit critique of capitalism in *MIAMI VICE*, where we displace our anxiety with the capitalist system onto these Lee Iacoccas of the snow industry? Fredric Jameson makes this very argument about the use of the Mafia in *THE GODFATHER*:

"This is the context in which the ideological function of the myth of the Mafia can be understood, as the substitution of crime for big business, as the strategic displacement of all the rage generated by the U.S. system onto this mirror-image of big business provided by the movie screen and various TV series, it being understood that the fascination with the Mafia remains ideological even if in reality organized crime has exactly the influence in American life such representations attribute to it. The function of the Mafia narrative is indeed to encourage the conviction that the deterioration of daily life in the United States is an ethical rather than an economic matter, connected, not with profit but rather "merely" with dishonesty, and with some omnipresent moral corruption whose ultimate mythical source lies in pure evil of the Mafiosi themselves. For genuinely political insights into the economic realities of late capitalism, the myth of the Mafia strategically substitutes the vision of what is seen to be a criminal aberration from the norm rather than the norm itself." [8]

To a degree I believe Jameson is right.[9] Yet in many gangster films, and certainly in *MIAMI VICE*, the displaced anxiety over capitalism — or more precisely, the risks and pitfalls of capitalism — occurs with a simultaneous desire to emulate and invoke the signs of that very same system. This desire exists in *MIAMI VICE*

because the show's cocaine discourse does not confine itself to the devalued characters of the cocaine smugglers, but it also disseminates itself among the stars of the show — Crockett and Tubbs — and the watching TV audience.

It is in regard to MIAMI VICE's audience that it becomes important for the show to represent the drug culture's own cocaine discourse in an authentic manner. Members of this audience have found it increasingly difficult to fantasize themselves as somehow not conforming to the various mainstream institutions. For such a fantasy they can still turn to the politics of drugs, simply because many such controlled substances remain illegal. People need do only one line of coke and stand outside the law; indeed, one becomes an outlaw. Much more glamorous (in a bourgeois sense) than pot, heroin, or acid, coke transforms people into the most romantic drug outlaws possible. Certainly the coke user is more colorful than those dour individuals who (still) define their opposition to the ruling institutions by long-term commitments to social change and revolution.

For the sensibility I have just caricatured, cocaine works on a fast-food principle of self-definition, where one quick consumption gives us access to a singularly striking political identity with a whole string of associations into which we can tap. The fact that many of these associations are also those of conspicuous consumption merely reflects how safely institutionalized our attempts at personal deinstitutionalization have become. Before MIAMI VICE this commodity of fast-food self-definition only resided in the actual taking of cocaine; now the show's discourse allows us to partake of this same service vicariously. The show's fantasy of outlaw consumption satisfies us because the discourse itself is authentic, part of the drug culture's own language of cocaine.

As this discourse moves beyond the show's frame, towards the audience, it simultaneously moves towards the thematic center of the show, the cops Crockett and Tubbs. With their beautiful women, Italian sports jackets, Wayfarer sunglasses, Ferrari sports cars, and action poses choreographed to rock & roll, Sonny and Ricardo participate more fully in the signs of a cocaine lifestyle than anyone else in the show. The only un-cocaine-like aspect of Crockett's and Tubbs' characters becomes their nonuse of cocaine. In both the viewers' and actors' case, actual use is simply unnecessary for signs of the drug discourse and our own participation as readers. The show explains Sonny's and Ricardo's flashy similarity to their criminal counterparts by reporting how, as undercover cops, they must often imitate those they wish to bust.

This plot device does allow a thematic exploitation of the disjunction between appearance and reality, akin to the episode of Gina as an undercover hooker and the gangland boss. Yet this narrative aid does not fully explain why Don Johnson's photo in *Rolling Stone* has him fishing a bag of white powder out of the Caribbean. The ambivalent intention of Johnson's photo appropriately repeats cocaine's contradictory role as most forbidden/ desired object in MIAMI VICE. Is the photo merely a reiteration of Johnson's function as a law-enforcement official, or is it a coy acknowledgement of his participation in a cultural production that desires, as part of its attraction, to elide its difference with the drug culture? The publicity surrounding Johnson's own partying past certainly does not inhibit this latter view of MIAMI VICE, as a cultural production that intends on showing it knows its culture well.

MIAMI VICE's discourse on cocaine and capitalism has also prospered and found a new home in this country's latest media war against drugs. One need only recall the TV ads centering on the blank face of a rhesus monkey who gave up everything — food and sex — for cocaine. What are we staring at but a simian reflection of our own capitalist selves, our definition as appetite, as conspicuous consumption, as the constant demand, "I want, I want"? Whereas MIAMI VICE implicitly holds out cocaine as the ultimate signifier of a capitalist lifestyle, the monkey commercial merely inverts the message and isolates cocaine as the cause of runaway consumption, a perversion of our more "normal" appetites. Give up cocaine, the ad implies, and you'll be able to keep your appetite for other commodities, for other areas of the marketplace, where conspicuous consumption will have no ill effect at all. That the monkey ad is a commercial for a private clinic merely reiterates the marketplace's ability to transform everything — even a desire for a non-appetite — into a commodity.

Perhaps the most self-revealing ad about the relation between cocaine and business is an anti-drug commercial not about cocaine, but marijuana. In the ad, a thirty to thirty-five year-old pothead smokes a joint with a friend while claiming the drug has never harmed him in any way. His mother's angry voice abruptly breaks in from off screen, asking if her son has found a job yet. The ad ends, underscoring the mother's accusation by ironically stating, "Nothing Happens with Pot." Thus the commercial demonstrates the economics that MIAMI VICE's glamorization of the cocaine discourse has implied all along: some drugs are better than others for life not only in the fast lane, but also on the fast track.

A final note: one overtly unfortunate consequence of MIAMI VICE's infatuation with the drug discourse is its labeling of the drug smugglers by race. This labeling reflects how the drug culture itself names drugs by their area of origin — Jamaican, Colombian, or Humboldt, for example. In various episodes Crockett and Tubbs have fought the Jamaicans, the Colombians, and the Haitians. The show associated each group with a drug lifestyle: the Colombians with cocaine, the Jamaicans with reggae and marijuana, and the Haitians with voodoo and hallucinogens. Each group was made up of psychotic and violent brutes to be exterminated. The obvious, racist implications of these associations are especially malign when one considers the United States' present foreign policy towards those Latin American states south of Miami's border. For just as the show's drug discourse does not solely reside among the drug smugglers themselves, their bloody fate does not so much signify the end of drugs, as the justifiable death of brown-skinned men.

Rock & roll and VICE

"MTV cops."

— Brandon Tartikoff, president of NBC, on MIAMI VICE

Unlike the clones it has spawned on other networks, MIAMI VICE will pay up to \$10,000 buying the rights to original rock songs rather than using made-for-TV imitations.[10] Jon Hammer, who has recorded with Jeff Beck, does the show's original computer synthesizer work. Besides Hammer and Frankie Goes to Hollywood, other diverse members of MIAMI VICE's rock & roll canon include Glenn Frey, Peter Dinklage, the Coasters, Todd Rundgren, U2, and Tina Turner. I do not use "canon" lightly. Next to its cocaine discourse, MIAMI VICE's rock & roll vocabulary has become its most effective tool for attracting its young and upwardly

mobile audience.

The absence of such a vocabulary is striking. Compare MIAMI VICE with its short-lived ABC imitator, THE INSIDERS, where the latter choreographed a car scene to a recording that was obviously a studio attempt at "new wave" music. The lack of a real recording artist immediately pegged THE INSIDERS as a cultural production outside of the culture it wished to address. In contrast, the authentic songs which MIAMI VICE uses have become the footnotes of its cultural authority, the signature of itself as a cultural spokesperson for a culture that grew up listening to rock & roll in the sixties and seventies, and now has become one of the most prominent audiences for consumer advertising. But as a "cultural spokesperson" what does MIAMI VICE say? What fantasies and allegories of capitalist life does its rock & roll construct?

In discussing the discourses of sex and drugs on MIAMI VICE, I've already named several: the female body as a commodity for male pleasure, outlaw consumerism, and life in the coked-out "fast lane." We have seen how these fantasies mutually share the signs of excessive wealth, conspicuous consumption, and material possession. We have further seen how rock & roll participates in the signification of those fantasies. Such a phenomenon should not seem surprising. Long associated with the body and pleasure, rock & roll effortlessly feeds back to the same primal instincts of sex and drugs. Yet, as with those discourses, its initial affiliation with rebellion and youth elides only momentarily the potential within it for other types of associations. As a type of music that now draws much of its strength from state-of-the-art technology, its very form exults in the high tech, late capitalist state that gave it birth. First introduced as a sign of youth, it has turned into a sign of the youth industry, as that very concept has become institutionalized, commodified, and fetishized. Finally, its feverish energy, what attracted many to the music who were faced with the dreary alternatives of white, suburban U.S.A. has turned out to be less discriminating than once thought. For, as a type of rhetoric, rock & roll may praise many different things.

Thus, first and foremost among MIAMI VICE's celebrations is its equation of the electric guitar with the gun. More important, MIAMI VICE's music not only sanctions violence, but corrective, institutionalized violence. Just as the outlaw discourse of cocaine now glamorizes the narcotics agent, so too does the rebellious, anarchic beat of rock fetishize the organized law enforcement official. (A rock interlude with a SWAT team is an archetypal MIAMI VICE image.) Such insights are not new. Writers like Hunter S. Thompson and Michael Herr have for quite awhile placed rock & roll and violence at the center of how contemporary United States runs. What is new is who is having and exploiting those insights. MIAMI VICE stands as just one of many mainstream industries/ institutions that have realized rock can revitalize, and thus resell, not only old genres, but old formulas — e.g., the ideology of male institutionalized violence.

The apotheosis of this resell in this new Cold War must be the neo-MTV fireworks of the film TOP GUN — or "Phallus in Wonderland," as J. Hoberman succinctly named it.^[11] As the times become more jingoistic, this movement from crime show to military film makes perfect sense. TOP GUN logically extends the idea lurking behind the MTV scenes of entrapment and stakeout in MIAMI VICE, that the undercover cop still has his uniform, and those in uniform are the ones who really

know how to rock & roll.

Besides its conflation with institutionalized violence, MIAMI VICE's music has another important effect upon the show. As "MTV cops," Crockett and Tubbs to a large degree inhabit the world of MTV, where life is done to music. Music videos largely started out as promotional tapes of rock artists performing their songs. In the late seventies, creators coupled this intention with a new concept that only a few visionaries beforehand — such as Richard Lester in his film *A HARD DAY'S NIGHT* foresaw: Have the rock stars perform in and out of their songs; i.e., have them not only play the music, but act in a narrative sequence choreographed to that same music.

Not surprisingly, the narrative sequence in many of these videos is often merely a skeletal frame wholly dependent upon the song. Crockett and Tubbs arrive at a time in media consciousness when the MTV idea has been exploited to death — or, perhaps, to a new mass-consumer vision of life. The fantasy MTV first and foremost sells its audience is that life can have the same aura of performance when it too is done to music, and furthermore, that this aura becomes the only register in our lives of which we are capable.[12] The musical excursions of Crockett and Tubbs are the perfect examples of beings living in Fredric Jameson's postmodern "pastiche," where individuals interacting with stylistic props to the tune of a contemporary hit replace narrative, psychological, and subjective depth.[13]

Many have noted the show's postmodern emphasis on imagistic and audio style at the expense of narration: Lee Saudin argues that the show disdains narrative closure in order to deny the neatness of the moral universe. In contrast, MIAMI VICE co-creator Lee Katzin says,

"The show is written for an MTV audience, which is more interested in images, emotions, and energy than plot and characters and words." [14]

What Saudin's point and Katzin's description leave out is that MIAMI VICE's fantasy — the phenomenology of MTV — represents the perfect experiential lifestyle in a capitalist, consumer society. What is such a lifestyle but an intense interaction with such props — such commodities as the female body, sports cars, speedboats, and cocaine? And how do we know it is intense except for the music, the literal rhythm of life in the fast lane? If we want to look for the transcendental signifier, rock music is it, the sign of the distinction between purposeful and aimless consumption. With our walkmans on, lost in the supermarket, we inhabit the same universe as Crockett, Tubbs, and the MTV stars, privy to the same "intensities" of a life choreographed to rock & roll.[15]

Jameson's point about the postmodern "pastiche" and the "intensities" of late capitalist life is not that they are inherently bad or reactionary, if such a judgment would mean that we can then refuse them, along with the rest of late capitalism's effects upon our lives. He uses a dialectical approach, seeing that if there is a Marxist history after late capitalism, it will occur not by rejecting, but by working through our late capitalist present.[16] This may provide little comfort in 1987, when we are reaping the more obviously blatant and vulgar consequences of the rock & roll capitalist lifestyle that MIAMI VICE anticipated, now that everything from wine coolers to scooters to sneakers to soft drinks is being sold by rock & roll stars and/or their songs.[17]

For artists still committed to rock, one reaction to the music's newly found commercialism might be to highlight radically the fact of rock & roll as a commodity. Such an agenda takes its cue from artists already operating in other mediums, such as Barbara Kruger and her Times Square sign that stated I'M NOT TRYING TO SELL YOU ANYTHING.[18] Culturecide's *Tacky Souvenirs of Pre-Revolutionary America* LP appears to be exploring this very project, of revealing how rock and capital conflate.[19] For it seems to be the case that MIAMI VICE's rock trend has exposed one basic truth about that music, that even the most marginalized or insurrectionary rock & roll is still within the marketplace, and to think otherwise is to risk a nostalgia irrelevant for future change.

Perhaps MIAMI VICE's conflation of rock & roll and late capitalist life might also help us understand how music and violence relate on the show. Just as the show's MTV phenomenology defines life, so too does it define death. The show's realistic representation of blood, guns, and wounds separates its action from the "cartoon" violence of MAGNUM P.I., and THE A TEAM. Yet the use of slow motion, freeze shots, and rock music also separates this action from the naturalistic violence of THE FRENCH CONNECTION. Death becomes a self-conscious spectacle that records one's last interaction with the world of props, the moment when one leaves the circulation of wealth and commodities in the fast lane forever. It is thus appropriate that a large number of the people who die on MIAMI VICE are drug smugglers, sellers and buyers. Death is when you literally can't deal anymore.

The customers of VICE

MIAMI VICE's "ambush" of primetime TV by sex and drugs and rock & roll repeats the basic intention of that medium as a service industry. The thematic repression of MIAMI VICE's services, drugs and prostitution, is merely the necessary precondition for the dissemination of those discourses along stylistic, imagistic, and visual lines — lines that intersect with a host of other commodity associations ranging from Italian fashion to the latest rock recording. Miami becomes the Xanadu of the fast lane lifestyle, a city populated by hip young professionals with the latest in weaponry. The victims of this fantasy are those individuals without enough cash flow to join in the circulation of such a dream. Their fate is non-representation, elision, and marginalization. Thus the Xanadu that MIAMI VICE constructs has much to say about its cocaine millionaire inhabitants, but in the first year the show was silent about the ghetto rebellions of Miami's poor.

Since then MIAMI VICE has represented the city's lower and under class. Unsurprisingly, the inhabitants of MIAMI VICE's ghetto have been as stylized and slick as the rest of the show's characters. In one episode there was the "good Kid" who played football and was doing his best to stay out of trouble; diametrically opposed to him was the teenage "crack king" who rode in a limousine and terrorized the ghetto to the beat of a rap song. Sonny's guilt over the murder of the "good kid" by the "crack king" was an existential tragedy that disguised a ritual invocation and confirmation of liberal guilt — that nothing can be done for the "few good kids" that do live in the underclass. The show's slick musical and visual style really did remind the viewer that the inevitability of the "good kid's" death was a ritual, a specific one of the liberal mind, the narrativization of the unavoidable tragedy of the ghettos.

The episode's conflation of rap and crack also affiliated the show with one aspect of the new mentality's crusading against drugs. While either disguising or distorting, as in the rhesus monkey ad, the obvious continuum between cocaine and a yuppies lifestyle of conspicuous consumption, this mentality easily invests crack with a series of inner city, urban associations, tinged with racism and fear of the poor. As with Jameson's remarks on the Mafia and my own on MIAMI VICE's cocaine vocabulary, what is at stake is not so much the "issue" of crack, but how the associations of that drug form a vocabulary of crack, and how that vocabulary then functions in our society. In the economy of drug discourses, crack is the unpleasant sign of a race and class getting rich that on no account should.

A far more compelling example of a progressive episode on the show occurred in MIAMI VICE's third season: G. Gordon Liddy played (!) Captain Real Estate, a rightwing CIA type involved in a plot to frame the Sandinistas for the murder of a priest actually killed by the Contras. The episode surprised me because it came out and explicitly stated that the Sandinistas were framed for a murder the Contras did, and because Real Estate, the unconditional villain of the show, escaped Sonny and Tubbs and succeeded with the frame. If this were a ritual of liberal guilt, it was one of a very explosive type. In terms of TV, we are much more used to tragedies of the ghetto, than to a story that explicitly depicts U.S. terrorist action in Latin America as the villainous component of a show. Although this episode does intervene radically in the conventional TV universe, it is hard to conceive how to seize such a moment for further political praxis, or to even predict when such a moment might slip through all the exigencies of the TV industry and occur again.

Perhaps such difficulties define the areas of investigation now challenging students of mass culture. The "Real Estate" episode itself seemed to construct a consciousness of the gap between the momentary intervention it was accomplishing, and the possibility of continual leftist praxis in primetime TV. I am not thinking so much of the fact that Capt. Real Estate wins, nor of the cynicism involved in letting Liddy profit from the opportunity of such an episode. There is, rather, one telling scene in the show that is also its most powerful: One of Real Estate's henchman goes to murder a TV reporter who has a video tape proving the Contras' guilt. He enters her office, hits her from behind, and she falls unconscious. The camera tracks slowly into a close-up of her lying on the floor, all in time to the ominous, obligatory beat of a rock tune. Suddenly, from the top of the screen, a gun appears, aimed at the reporter's head. The shot freezes as interference appears on the screen, literally making the TV viewer's screen one of the many TV screens in the reporter's office. The interference grows, till gun and body are barely discernible. Thus the episode asserts the distance and interference between its particular images and the TV audience who consume the images without seizing them, or who seize the images all the while knowing it is the distance and interference that must be consumed too.

What, then, about the customers, the audience of VICE? They are certainly hip, and are surely lost, if they buy the final commodity the show offers: that their participation in its discourses of sex and drugs and rock & roll will distinguish them from any other consumer audiences in an "authentic" way. In any arena, no distinction of any worth will occur through an uncritical affiliation with the imagery and vocabulary of a discourse. Such signs will only mark the moment of our entrapment, if we refuse to situate how, when, and why they inform our

consciousness.

The question of a distinct identity carries a further, darker resonance when we realize that MIAMI VICE is also one of the few mass media border towns between us and our southern neighbors. It is the only primetime TV show that regularly gives us a glimpse of the Latin American world that touches upon and informs Miami. And in this critical period in history, when it is absolutely necessary to know whom we live next to, and thus among, what does MIAMI VICE most often show, and what do we most often see? Only a feverish circulation of bodies and drugs all moving to the beat of a Genesis song; only a cash flow that entices, kills, and entices again; only late capitalism's latest version of ourselves.

Notes

1. Emily Benedek, "Inside MIAMI VICE," *Rolling Stone* 444, March 1985: 56.
2. For further discussions on the newly arisen 80s relevancy of drugs and sex and rock & roll, see "Sex Under Siege," *Village Voice* Literary Supplement Number 48, Sept. 1986, *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXI No. 36, 9 Sept. 1986; the "Drugs Are Us" section in *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXI No. 39, 30 Sept. 1986; and Richard Goldstein, "The New Society," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXI No. 52, 30 Dec. 1986: 23-28.
3. For an analysis of the homoerotic component in this patriarchal formation, see Jeremy G. Butler, "MIAMI VICE and the Legacy of the Film Noir," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 13.3 (1985): 132-33.
4. I borrow the concept of John Berger's, that women are always trained to look upon themselves with a "male gaze." See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking, 1972): 146.
5. Lee Saudin, "The Virtues of MIAMI VICE," *The Chicago Reader* Vol. 14, No. 20, 15 Feb. 1985" 15. Saudin's article is a counter-argument to mine, in that she sees MIAMI VICE's first season as an example of progressive TV: "For the first time in decades we have a TV show that doesn't treat capitalism as a gift from God," *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Two other recent works that use cocaine as an allegory for big business are Jay McInerney's BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY and Brian de Palma's SCARFACE, two cultural productions also known, in their own ways, for excess and/or life in the fast lane. For some more views on cocaine and the economy see, Scott L. Malcomson, "Cocaine Republic," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXI, No. 34, 26 Aug. 1986: 15-20, and Pete Hamill, "White Line Fever," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXI, No. 34, 26 August 1986: 21-27.
8. Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 146.
9. Consider, for example, *Time's* praise for the show since it "has brought TV's cops and robbers back to its roots: the mythic battle between good and evil." See Richard Zoglin, "Cool Cops, Hot Show," *Time* 16 Sept. 1985: 61.

10. Zoglin 63.

11. J. Hoberman, "Phallus in Wonderland," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXI, No. 21, 27 May 1986: 59.

12. This aura would not be the Benjamin aura that comes from the cult of the unique art object, but the "phony smell of the commodity" that comes from the cult of the star personality. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed. (New York: Schocken 1969) 231. The later seasons of MIAMI VICE have thought up a new tactic for creating more star aura, and solidifying its hip, cultural credentials: having MTV performers and other exotic members of the media guest star on the show. Recent guest have included Little Richard, Miles Davis, Peter Sellars, and G. Gordon Liddy.

13. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August, 1984): 12-13.

14. Saudin 14, and Zoglin 61.

15. Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 10-12.

16. "As for the as yet untheorized original space of some new 'world system' of multinational or late capitalism (a space whose negative or baleful aspects are only too obvious), the dialectic requires us to hold equally to a positive or 'progressive' evaluation of its emergence, as Marx did for the newly unified space of the national markets, or as Lenin did for the older imperialist global network," Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 36.

17. For an overview of the current situation, see Leslie Saven, "Rock Rolls Over," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXII, No. 32, 11 Aug. 1987: 71-75.

18. See Ellen Lubell, "Spectacolor Short-Circuits," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXII, No. 6, 10 Feb. 1987: 81. For a general discussion of political art, the avant-garde, and the conflation of art and economy, see Hal Foster, "For a concept of the Political in Art," *Art in America* April 1984: 17-23.

19. See Simon Frith, "Killing Jokes," *The Village Voice* Vol. XXXII, No. 35, 1 Sept. 1987: 75.

L.A. Law. Miami Vice Power in prime time

by Kathleen Karlyn

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Florida juts like an arm into the Caribbean, pointing toward the tropics and the exoticism of Latin America. Of all parts of the United States, it ventures farthest into strange waters. Miami is its heart, and it beats with rhythms both irresistible and unsettling for the stolid heartland of the country. Teeming with images of nature — parrots, flamingos, water and speed, women's bodies flaunting sensuality — Miami is our heart of darkness.

Across the continent, Los Angeles rises like a steel and glass monument built on a plain. Like Dallas, Houston and other cities we have constructed on what before had been arid wastelands, it is a monument to our culture. Los Angeles represents law — the rule of reason and patriarchy that controls nature and exploits it for its own purposes.

Together they map the U.S. psyche in terms of power and ideology. Shown back-to-back on Friday nights the fall of 1986, we have seen the whole vision that as a pair they present: first the alluring violence, the seductive dreamlike world of MIAMI VICE, the underside of power that one hour later is tamed, humanized and "yuppified" in L.A. LAW. In the terms of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the power that is raw in MIAMI VICE is cooked with platitudes and ideology in L.A. LAW; the law of the streets and the jungles of South America refined into leather-bound legal volumes and robed judges.

The raw and the cooked

Extravagant images of nature and glamorized exoticism fill the opening sequences of MIAMI VICE, in which powerboats and sailboats, jai alai pelotas, greyhounds and thoroughbreds race recklessly across the screen. L.A. LAW, on the other hand, shows us first a California license plate, paying homage both to the cult of the automobile and to the licensing and numbers that play so large a role in our culture. Then, as in DALLAS, we're shown the skyline on a plain (with only a hint of smog-veiled mountains behind); frozen shots successively nearing the city; shots from below of towering glass skyscrapers; then interiors filled with elites who through language are working the system to what we will be told is everyone's advantage. We aren't shown so much as a blade of grass that seems to exist apart

from this constructed world of artifice and logocentrism. Law, after all, is language reaching toward its heights of abstraction, far from its roots in labor (Rossi-Landi 24) and its imprecise richness in poetry.

While MIAMI VICE is the unconscious, the world of Dionysus, L.A. LAW is consciousness, Apollo, the reason that keeps it under control. Later in the season L.A. LAW was rescheduled to another night. But before it was, we could be confident when we topped off our Friday's evening's viewing with the 11 o'clock news that the weirdness and danger we'd flirted with at 9 o'clock would be neatly repackaged at 10 o'clock and disposed of by the end of the hour. That year, 1986, especially, MIAMI VICE has ventured more strongly into narrative. While it hasn't sacrificed its visual and aural style, it has enhanced its power by exploring through narrative the contradictions it merely evoked before.

In several powerful episodes, which I'll discuss later, it has left these contradictions unresolved. L.A. LAW, on the other hand, tends to sanitize the contradictions it deals with and wrap them up neatly. It touches on such current "hot" media issues as missing children, yuppie kids dealing drugs, sex discrimination cases, and so on — but with a vision and tone that diffuse their intensity. Hotshot lawyers offer our best chance at protecting this best of all worlds, after all.

Both shows support the view that the world is threatened by lawlessness. In MIAMI VICE this lawlessness is represented by the "marginals" of our society. Marginals people MIAMI VICE — indeed, Miami itself is painted as a world on the fringe. From that fringe it ventures even further into the margin, into the underworld of crime kings, voodoo, and Latin America, but that margin is usually glamorized and thereby rendered safe. Lawlessness in L.A. LAW is more abstract and represented by threats, usually in the form of "bad values" like greed or lack of idealism, to the sanctity of The Law.

Marginals exist in L.A. LAW as well, but there they are rendered safe by institutionalization. During the season, after McKenzie-Brackman law firm hires a Chicano lawyer, not only is the firm able to move on to its main business — making obscene amounts of money — but we begin to worry that the lawyer will lose the edge that sets him apart from his establishment colleagues. In fact, money and its counterpart, machismo, have a lot to do with both programs. The worlds of MIAMI VICE and L.A. LAW, like the social world in which they exist, are driven by the pursuit of money and the exercise of machismo.

MIAMI VICE and L.A. LAW are both about power. Together they show our fascination with it — with the bloody violence of the streets and the bloodless violence of the courts. Together they form a symbolic representation of the U.S. psyche. They show how power exercises itself over the marginals of our society, either by relegating them to an exotic fringe to which we can pay brief, titillating visits, or by seducing them into our institutions with the offer of money and prestige. Most of all they show how power upholds our ideology by controlling the threat of lawlessness and disorder.

MIAMI VICE and style

Whatever one may think of MIAMI VICE, the program's style is unmistakable. It is perhaps the strongest element in glamorizing the margin and representing a dream

world of the unconscious. In MIAMI VICE, image and music take the place of language. This style has drawn both criticism for its emphasis on sensation over intellect and praise for its exploitation of the medium of television. Michael Pollan wrote in *Channels* that it has brought a

"new visual sophistication to a medium that for most of its history has been remarkably word-bound" (24).

It isn't only images, however, that contribute to this style but music as well. In fact, producer Michael Mann believes that the show's use of music is what most sets it apart from other TV shows. He uses the example of an episode from an earlier season, "Smuggler's Blues," in which Glenn Frey's song is used almost in operatic counterpoint to the action. When Frey sings, "It's the lure of easy money. It's got a very strong appeal," Mann says, "It's like a Greek chorus, coming in to chant, 'Fear him, fear him!'" (Benedek 62). Music helps tell the story subliminally. Mann acknowledges MIAMI VICE's relation to music video. He also traces a more significant link to their common ancestor in film, especially the films of Eisenstein, who pioneered the concept of using music as a counterpoint to visual images (62). Pollan, on the other hand, says that the show's immediate ancestor is HILL STREET BLUES which, with its "gritty" style of verité documentary, was the first successful prime time show to develop a self-conscious visual style. That style, according to Jeremy G. Butler, is closely identified with film noir, which defines itself more by its anti-traditional visual style than by character and theme.

Style allows MIAMI VICE to frame violence in beauty and turn appearance and reality upside down. Both the lushness of the natural settings and the opulence of the manmade ones (the Italian clothes, Ferraris, and spectacular interiors) make this exotic world a gorgeous one, which the camera emphasizes whenever it lingers over a perfectly framed shot. Mann's well-known dictum about the series, "No earth tones," points to its initial use of color (lavenders, turquoises, pinks) to paint a world visually foreign to mainstream United States. The hues may be darker this season, but their impact remains as strong.

Furthermore, this is a world in which reality and fantasy are casually and easily intertwined, as evident in the program's use of cameo performances by such public figures as Lee Iacocca and G. Gordon Liddy. Even Vice President Bush tried, unsuccessfully, to get on the show in a role that presumably would toughen his prissy image. However, unlike earlier shows in which public figures appeared as themselves, on MIAMI VICE they can re-create their personas. (Critic William A. Henry III raises the disturbing question of who is using whom when this happens.)

Pollan raises even deeper questions about the moral implications of the show's emphasis on style above narrative. After praising HILL STREET BLUES because it is a "writer's show," he continues:

"You cannot, however, 'read' MIAMI VICE in this way, interpreting its visual style in terms of its writing to uncover a fairly coherent view of the world ... It goes to war each week with the entire tradition of Western dramaturgy. The result is television that offers less for the mind than for the eye."

He places such television, with its emphasis on sensation, in "the province of sensation" for the pleasure of people who have come to "enjoy images not as

windows on the real world but simply as images" (26-28).

While Pollan has much of interest to say about *MIAMI VICE*, I question the extent to which he privileges narrative and realism. *MIAMI VICE* has paid more attention to narrative this season and unquestionably has benefited from doing so. But although narrative, with its linear causality and closure, has indeed dominated Western dramaturgy, it is not the only way of conceptualizing and explaining the world. More important, I believe that the success of the program results more from its vision than its style — from how it uses style to play on our desires and fears. Two programs that were based simply on imitating its style, *HOLLYWOOD BEAT* and *THE INSIDERS*, failed.

Verbal world of *L.A. LAW*

L.A. LAW, on the other hand, is a continent away from *MIAMI VICE* in style as well as setting. *L.A. LAW* is reason to *MIAMI VICE*'s emotion, so it situates us back in the familiar world where language dominates and controls the unruly, sensuous elements of *MIAMI VICE*. There are no Caribbean colors to be found here, and the program is shot almost entirely in closed spaces. "The practice of law is inherently complex, and it isn't inherently visual," producer Steven Bochco says. "It's a verbal world, and rather than run from words, we have chosen to embrace them" (Schwartz 62).

The camera, the artifice of the program, become invisible on *L.A. LAW*, thereby making its representations seem all the more true to life. Narrative is employed in the program in the serialized fashion found in *HILL STREET BLUES* and *ST. ELSEWHERE*. This allows the program to develop many characters and plot threads, which it eventually resolves. But by including as many as five or six of these threads in each episode, the power of each thread is diffused. In effect, the program uses narrative in its own way to tell us its message about power: The world may be complex, it may have such problems as poverty, AIDS and incest, but none of these problems is overwhelming and this complexity is manageable because the law is in control.

According to Bochco,

"*L.A. LAW* is about people with some real personal and professional power, and it's set in a world that is stylish, sophisticated, upscale and verbal" (Schwartz 62).

This statement points to the first of two major aspects of ideology reproduced in both shows: money. Both shows glorify money and consumption by centering so strongly on the lives and lifestyles of the wealthy. In both, wealth is the fruit of the disorder each battles: the violent drug empires of *MIAMI VICE* and the white-collar intrigues of *L.A. LAW*. This wealth is flashier, more nouveau, more fantastic, in *MIAMI VICE*, as one would expect from the margin. In a class corollary to the psychological view of the two shows, the world of the irrational is also shown as the world of the working class — of cops who may drive Ferraris and wear Armani suits but are cops nonetheless.

These people have no real place in the world of reason, which is ruled by the yuppies and old boys (with old money) of *L.A. LAW*. Real power in our country

isn't wielded by the cops and crooks of Miami but by the social class represented by L.A. LAW. Money in L.A. LAW is patrician and tasteful. While in MIAMI VICE value can still be shown by action, by macho confrontations with danger, in L.A. LAW this value is totally intellectualized and transformed into money. The firm presents lawyer Ann Kelsey with a check for \$86,000 "to show your value to us." Chicano lawyer Sifuentes notes the importance of a lunch meeting by its \$100 price tag. And short, sweet, dumpy Markowitz suddenly gains new stature as a sex symbol when over a candlelight dinner at his house, which Kelsey has seen for the first time ("It's stunning — like out of House and Garden"), he tells her, "I have a confession to make. I'm rich."

Discussions about money dominate nearly every meeting of the law firm and every divorce case we see on the show. One episode begins with a group of law students questioning patriarch McKenzie about starting salaries and perks. Later he barks at his secretary,

"Damn it, Iris, I tried to convey a sense of responsibility and pride in the law, and all those little snots could see were dollar signs."

They aren't the only ones who do, yet the program veils this obsession by parodying it in a laughable character, Brackman, who in one unbelievable episode tries the unthinkable: reducing the boss's salary.

Later one of the "little snots" who outraged McKenzie approaches him and says, about the law:

"If defending the ruling class interests is what it's about, I don't want any part of it. If being able to argue either side of the same case, how do you do a good job and still hold on to your values?"

McKenzie hires him on the spot. By casting McKenzie as an idealist and Brackman as the realist, and by poking merciless fun at Brackman, the show suggests that rich firms indeed do more than defend the interests of the ruling class, and that idealism about the law still prevails.

Powerful controlling male figures

Cops, criminals and courts — this is male turf, whether in Miami or Los Angeles, and this turf calls for a powerful male to control it. Thus the second major value that underlies both programs is patriarchy, and contrasting the two patriarchs is instructive. In MIAMI VICE that person is Lt. Castillo, the epitome of machismo, the man who knows the alien world of lawlessness because he is an outsider himself. There is romance and tragedy in his past — in Southeast Asia, where he learned mysterious things — but this past is shrouded in secrecy; he never speaks of it. Castillo is a powerful presence. Dressed always in stark black and white, he stands out in glittery Miami, and we often see him silhouetted or dramatically paired with Crockett or Tubbs. He seldom speaks, and when he does, he speaks monosyllabically. He is never flustered. He never shows emotion. He never makes a mistake. His authority rests entirely on his brute, inarticulate power.

Leland McKenzie in L.A. LAW, on the other hand, is the antithesis of Castillo. While Castillo is young, dark and foreign, McKenzie is an aging WASP. While

Castillo radiates power through his silence and stillness, McKenzie bustles around, chirping, complaining, scolding and preaching. Whenever he opens his mouth, a platitude pops out: "Blaming others for your frustration is easy, doing something about it is hard," he says, patronizing his secretary of many years. However, while Castillo has all the codings of a strong male, McKenzie's power far outreaches his. He has command of the institutions shaped by language. Castillo is only a police lieutenant, and while his power keeps the disruptive forces of Miami under control, that is child's play compared to the power wielded by McKenzie. Castillo only enforces the law; McKenzie and his class make it.

Each patriarch commands troops suited to his mission, and these troops can be studied by the opposition of gender. In MIAMI VICE, the Crockett/Tubbs pair dominates the show, with another male pair that backs them up. Women are primarily adornment in this unabashedly macho show; women's only role in nature is biological. L.A. LAW, on the other hand, shows a world at least beginning to make more room for women. Two are tested and make the grade: they are admitted to the all-male law firm. Others appear as judges, and one has a major role as a district attorney.

Crockett and Tubbs

The Crockett/Tubbs pair, which is at the heart of MIAMI VICE, works because it plays on deep concerns and identifications in our culture. The most obvious is racial. Crockett and Tubbs are not the first black and white team to appear on television. Twenty years ago Bill Cosby and Robert Culp starred in the top-rated series I SPY (Moore 59). Even farther back, in such pairs as Huck and Jim, Ishmael and Queequeg, Americans have tried to resolve in fiction the racial contradictions we experience in reality.

In addition to these racially mixed pairs, there are untold numbers of simply male pairs — Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and other cowboys through whom our culture has expressed its romance with the freedom of the West. The fact that these deep bonds seem to occur more readily between men than between men and women suggests the misogyny of our culture, its fear and therefore exclusion of women. Crockett and Tubbs, whose lives revolve around their jobs and whose dependence on each other as partners is, as all police shows tell us, quasi-mystical, are heirs to this tradition.

Black Tubbs, as one would expect, plays second fiddle to white Crockett. Indeed, the racism implicit in Tubbs' subordination to Crockett is one of the most serious charges leveled at the show, which peoples its representation of the world of nature with racial and ethnic minorities. Interestingly, however, it's not Tubbs' race but his sophistication that the program uses to place him a little off its off-center center. He's from the Northeast, from New York — a sign of the establishment world of L.A. LAW. He knows about wine, about culture. When Crockett fell in love with an upscale architect, it was Tubbs who really understood the gap between her and Crockett and who knew simply by glancing around her apartment (or condo, most likely) that she would never fit into the blue collar world of cops, even cops who masquerade as high rollers as convincingly as Crockett and Tubbs do.

Crockett, on the other hand, grew up in the South. He played football. He's white, blond and handsome. He's not strange or threatening. He's a hero most of the

United States (or most middle-American males) can identify with, If Crockett can tame those fierce drug barons of South America, then we too are similarly empowered over "strangeness." Yet taming them isn't easy. It keeps both cops, but especially Crockett, on the edge. The thrill of watching the pair venture out of control into the forbidden terrain where the ego no longer reigns accounts, I believe, for the appeal of the program. It expresses our fascination with and ambivalence toward violence, lawlessness and the foreign.

Sexuality is almost caricatured in MIAMI VICE, consistent with the program's orientation toward the unconscious, and women exist as they probably do in the repressed dreams of most U.S. men. Masculinity for Crockett and Tubbs equals physical prowess and thriving on danger. Crockett's famous stubble is a sign of masculinity, of flaunting the "sissy" conventions of the establishment. Femininity, according to the show, is embodied in Trudy and Gina. Like Zwiteck and Zito, the peripheral male cops, they are ethnic types — Gina Hispanic, Trudy black. And like good women, they know their place. They back up Crockett and Tubbs and mostly follow orders, but they do enjoy friendly camaraderie with the fellows. Only rarely is an episode based on them, and then only when they need to be rescued or when the episode is about a "women's" issue (for example, baby-smuggling). More to the point, they are there for adornment and to reinforce society's role for women. When men go undercover, they can play at running crime empires; when women do, they must play at prostitution. Gina and Trudy know all the angles on selling one's body. Whether on the streets or in high-class parties, they are articulate in the body language of trading on their sexuality. Mostly they dress in outrageously sexy clothes — glittery, sprayed on, plunging-neckline outfits and spike-heeled shoes.

Depiction of gender in L.A. LAW is predictably more subtle, civilized and contemporary. In its first season the program included a large number of characters who were still barely formed. Yet from the first episode the contrast between the men in MIAMI VICE and L.A. LAW was obvious. For the lawyers in McKenzie-Brackman law firm, violence and physical danger hardly exist. They fight their battles with their minds, their educations and connections. And because society's power resides in them, the greatest threats to its order they face are often among and within themselves — their conflicts, failings, and errors in judgment.

A bunch of lawyers

In addition to great white father McKenzie and greedy Number Two man Brackman, L.A. LAW's dominant males are represented by the following quartet: Becker, Kuzak, Markowitz and Sifuentes. Becker is portrayed, mostly sympathetically, as a womanizer who can't resist the charms of the rich, beautiful women he represents in divorce cases (McKenzie-Brackman generally doesn't help poor or homely women get divorces). He is, however, blind to the devotion of his pathetic secretary. Professionally, what he most wants is to be allowed to practice entertainment law; he, unlike the stuffy other members of the firm, believes that entertainment is "where it's at."

Kuzak is probably the Crockett of L.A. LAW — meant to be the point of identification for most viewers. As a young, handsome lawyer on his way up, he has the fewest obvious flaws. He is the one who pursues beautiful prosecutor Van Owen and "wins" her away from her dull but decent fiancé. And he is responsible for

bringing Sifuentes, the token minority, into the firm. Sifuentes is a hustling, hard-hitting, smart Hispanic lawyer who joins the firm on the condition that he be allowed to do as much *pro bono* work as he wants. By taking him in, the firm (or the program's writers?) can appease its conscience both about its own priorities in the kind of law it practices and about its WASPISH makeup. The firm's token minority before Sifuentes was a black man, who quit when Sifuentes was hired because of his frustration with how the rest of the firm had excluded him. McKenzie's sanctimonious parting words to him: "It was both our faults." Finally, the most original of these characters is Markowitz, the short, paunchy middle-aged man who is aggressive only in wooing lawyer Ann Kelsey. What is most appealing about him is that he shatters several male stereotypes: he is not driven about his career, and his sexiness is based not on machismo but on genuine respect and love for a woman.

Women in *L.A. LAW*

Women are making inroads into the reasoned world of *L.A. LAW*, but they and the problems they face are still depicted somewhat ambiguously. Women appear in one of several groups: young professionals, secretaries, and everyone else. It is in the second two groups that stereotypes appear most problematically. Secretaries are shown as either victims or fools, taking abuse from their male bosses which neither party seems to recognize. McKenzie's secretary Iris, after a lifetime of service to him that included an affair when she was younger, angrily speaks back to him in one episode when he yells at her because the coffee she served him is too strong and in a china cup he doesn't like. When she expresses her frustration to him, he tells her to go to night school if she wants to change her situation — but in the meantime, not to blame him for her problems.

Becker's secretary Roxy, on the other hand, would probably never dream of speaking sharply to him (at least early in the series); she is devotedly, mindlessly in love with him. "Everyone else" is basically upper class and beautiful — the wives Becker represents, a female journalist, other women in the legal profession. In one episode we meet a bag lady and in another an "average" U.S. mother (whose husband has been raping her daughters), but the portrayal of them is shallow. One has to be a professional woman to get serious attention on this program.

L.A. LAW does raise a few familiar questions about these professional women: To what extent must they become like men to be accepted by the male establishment? Must they, too, sacrifice personal lives for their work if they are to "succeed"? Abby Perkins' husband leaves her and abducts their child — because, he says, he won't take second place to her work. Kelsey and Van Owen have no private lives until their suitors wear them down. When Kelsey insists that Perkins leave her personal grief over the loss of her child outside the office, Perkins accuses Kelsey of not knowing what it's like to care for something outside her work and of sublimating all of her energy in her work. Van Owen, on the other hand, gives up her professional goals because of her romance with Kuzak. His clownish courtship costs her a chance at a judgeship, which she finally accepts as being for the best: "All my life I've tried to be what everyone else wants me to be," she says. It seems that women alone have to deal with these hard choices.

At the same time, women are shown as able to support each other in ways that men cannot. If one of the threats to the law is the cynicism of lawyers like Brackman,

L.A. LAW also suggests that the idealism of the outsiders — the women and Sifuentes — is its best defense.

All of these characters enact dramas that in various ways seek to uncover and deal with contradictions involving power in our society. In MIAMI VICE the plots are generally based on drug crimes from abroad, but this season the series has explored new territory with a stronger emphasis on narrative and a harder look at problems that originate within our own borders. In L.A. LAW, the plots are based on problems that are domestic — and essentially domesticated.

By early in its first season, L.A. LAW had racked up a long list of subjects unusual for fictional programs on prime time television: incest, transexuality, breast cancer, sexism, racism, AIDS, child abuse, child abduction, euthanasia, capital punishment, tax fraud, slum lords, the homeless, even polygamy. Most of the attention has gone to subjects that will titillate rather than disturb or threaten its viewers. The deeper, structural problems of our society, those problems that are subtler and more complex, are essentially ignored. While L.A. LAW shows the struggle of women and minorities to become a part of the establishment, and even questions the cynicism and greed that exist there, it never suggests the need for major reform to end the inequities of our society.

This can be seen in several examples. Van Owen faces the dilemma of prosecuting a homosexual for shooting his lover, who was dying from AIDS. She must uphold the principle of the law that euthanasia is wrong, but knows that prosecuting the man, who himself has AIDS, is inhumane. She wins her case — but in the following episode works out a deal that will tie an appeal up for at least a year. By then, the man will be dead anyway. So we see this as a victory.

Next, Kuzak must defend a man known to have raped, tortured and killed children. Because Kuzak doesn't believe in the death penalty and is committed to giving his clients the best possible defense, he gets the man out of jail and on the street. Everyone fears that the man, who is incorrigible and disgusting, will kill again. Instead, police follow him and kill him when he holds up a store. Again, this is presented as a victory of sorts; the law is upheld, and no innocent people are hurt. Finally, Brackman, who is slumlord on the side, is being sued by the tenants of some of his property. These tenants are represented by the black lawyer who quit the firm. By the end of the hour, Brackman is forcibly taken on a tour of his property, sees the squalor and repents. It's as easy as that. This is not to say that the series solves all problems so tidily; compared to most prime time shows, it has a high degree of ambiguity and complexity. But essentially things do work out for the best. Our heroes may be flawed, but the law is not.

The law in *MIAMI VICE*

In contrast, on MIAMI VICE the law — or the institutions of our society — is flawed indeed, according to several recent episodes of the show, which have refused to resolve the contradictions they have explored. In the first a journalist friend of Crockett's has returned from Nicaragua with footage of Contras murdering civilians. The journalist pleads with Crockett to help him get the tape to a TV station; powerful forces are trying to destroy the tape. In the end, he is killed. The tape, though, has been delivered so we feel that at least the journalist has given his life for a worthwhile cause. Then we watch the news broadcast. Not a word is

mentioned, not a sign appears of the tape.

The second episode, "Walkalone," takes a brutal look at the inside of prisons. Here we see the law entirely inverted. Here, within our own geographic boundaries, not in some foreign jungles, we are as far removed from the order of L.A. as we can get. If in Miami the law of L.A. becomes a kind of anarchy, in the prison it is reconstituted, but upside down. The guards have total power and are totally corrupt. Tubbs must venture into this underworld (to avenge the death of a woman who had him "walking on air" for two weeks — women also serve as motivators for action), and the camera follows his journey as if it were a journey into hell. He begins speeding alone out of the city in his expensive car. First we see him stopped and arrested, then loaded with others on a bus, then stripped first of his diamond earring, then of his expensive clothes, and then herded through gate after clanging gate until he reaches his target: D Block, or "hell on earth." By this time he is a number on a mug shot, all visible traces of his individuality stripped away. We see shots angled up at the guards, close-ups of prisoners' faces, and other carefully composed shots of groups of prisoners in their blue uniforms. Against the sound track of hard rock, loudspeakers droning and bars clanging, these images powerfully evoke aspects of law, power and order repressed.

Prison life is patriarchy in its most unmediated condition, where with no women to dominate, the stronger men force the weaker into submission. Order is strictly and hierarchically maintained by brute power. The guards have the guns so they are at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the Aryan Brothers, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Cuban Muittos. "God help you if you're a Rican," someone tells Tubbs.

When the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood steps forward to defend Tubbs, he is killed in cold blood by a rifleman in a guard tower. There is no outcry at this brutality. "It's the will of Allah, Brother," another black prisoner says to Tubbs, before he and the others walk away from the dead man. The power of the prison system is so untouchable that Castillo himself must venture in to rescue Tubbs. As troops prepare to storm the prison, Castillo, out of his black and white, disguised in prison-blue, stalks like a dancer into D Block. Order is eventually restored, but before it is, the prisoners beat the guards (possibly killing one) who brutalized them most viciously. "At least they got a jury of their peers," Tubbs says. This is a far cry from the juries on L.A. LAW.

MIAMI VICE ventures into another underworld of sorts in an episode called "The Good Collar." As in "Walk Alone," this underworld, the urban ghetto, is of our own making, not a threat from outside. This episode presents as bleak a vision of what can be done about racism and poverty as I have seen on television. In it, Crockett tries to help a young black athlete, Archie, who made one mistake in trying to pull himself out of the ghetto. His big chance was a football scholarship, and he needed a new pair of shoes for the crucial game. Because he was too proud to ask for a handout, he made a delivery for a local gang member. Crockett arrests him, but when the cop hears his story he arranges a clean slate for him. The two connect especially because of Crockett's background as a football player; Crockett gives him a new football, money for new shoes and a promise to be at the big game.

As McCane, a tough, old black social worker who knows Archie well, explains, "Archie's no rogue." But he also says:

"You can't be from his 'hood and not know how to mix it up. You know what the homies call it, 'Germ City.' Half the boys dropped out, the rest have gone to the joint or died."

McCane also gives us a sense of the hopes riding on a boy like Archie when he says he knows what it's like to

"climb out. When you see someone who can make that stride, it does something to your heart."

Even in the lush MIAMI VICE style, the portrait of this 'hood is graphic: mountains of trash, graffiti-covered walls, a man about to urinate on a sidewalk, children watching people being beat up, children jumping up to catch drugs showered on them by a 15-year-old Count Luther, the worst of the gang leaders.

At first it looks as if Archie will get his chance. But then, the gang warfare goes out of control. The cold-eyed young prosecutor Pepin feels pressure to do something about it ("I need something for the 6 o'clock news") and decides to go back on his word to Crockett and Archie. We have already seen a clue to his cynicism when Tubbs asks him why he is so unmoved by the body of a kid who overdosed on drugs. Pepin explains that he has been working with kids for sixteen months and couldn't cry every time he saw a dead one. Archie feels that he has to accept responsibility for what he did and agrees to wear a wire to help indict Count Luther, even though Crockett and McCane plead with him not to let himself be used.

McCane bitterly tells him, "That ticket out isn't real anymore. They're just holding it out in front of you." In the end, Count Luther gets arrested, but not before he discovers the wire and kills Archie. When a bitter Crockett goes to Archie's house, McCane won't let him in, and Archie's grandmother hurls the football out the door at him. Another cop congratulates him on making a "good collar" in getting Count Luther. (Earlier Crockett had suggested that inspirational McCane should get a collar and a congregation, but the real "good collar," of course, was Archie.) Crockett just drops the football in a trashcan.

When Crockett throws away that football, he's throwing away hope and dreams. The program says that even for the best — those with the greatest integrity, talent and youth — there's no way out of a social situation like the one into which Archie was born. The "ticket isn't real." Almost as bitter is the fact that Crockett was unable to do anything about it. The racism and class division that build ghettos also build walls, which not only keep the Archies in but keep the Crocketts out. Archie's family hates Crockett, and he knows why. One could argue that MIAMI VICE tends to present the social problems it deals with more as the tragedy of sensitive Crockett than of the real victims, but in this case I don't believe that is true. This episode could have emphasized the victory over the gang leaders, but instead it looked at the social situation that gave rise to the gangs. It could have congratulated itself on the success of the law, but instead it lamented the larger failure of the society that created it in the first place. Prosecutor Pepin is a far cry from L.A. LAW's Grace, and this ending far from Brackman's fairytale change of heart in the squalid halls of his tenement.

Finally, in trying to place these two series in their social contexts, we're left with

some difficult questions about the vision presented by each. L.A. LAW gives us some "positive images" of women and minorities and tries to expose the contradictions within the institution and practice of the law. But it blunts those contradictions. In effect, its tone and vision are comic — what Northrop Frye would describe as social and integrative. It isn't very clear just what we are meant to think of the foolish secretary and the playboy divorce lawyer, or even how we are to react to McKenzie, who after all has many of the trapping of the "ideal father." The tone of the program, which is essential in determining how viewers are meant to perceive types like these, just isn't that clear.

MIAMI VICE, on the other hand, is woefully lacking in positive images and reinforces many of the most problematic aspects of U.S. mythology. Yet, in the 86-87 season, at least, it has confronted some of the most difficult problems in our society and looked boldly at them. Even critic Pollan, who has few good things to say about the series, grants that it may provide a "serviceable metaphor for its times." It suggests "quite by accident," he says, that Miami's prosperity, which rests on the unsteady foundation of drug money, is like our country's dependence on credit:

"Good times in Reagan's America, Eke Crockett's lifestyle, may depend on a kind of forgetting" (28).

This may be true, but I think we have to look elsewhere for the key to whatever truths the series reveals. It may seem farfetched to describe the vision of MIAMI VICE as tragic — or even to insist that it has a vision. Part of its appeal, however, rests on that quality we also associate with tragedy — vicariously watching people explore the forbidden. Critics argue that the series makes crime seem attractive, that Crockett and Tubbs are no more than crooks working on the right side of the law. But Ahab, Lucifer and Faust weren't exactly good guys either.

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Platoon. Full Metal Jacket Back to Vietnam

by Mike Felker

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In contemporary Hollywood soldier movies, there's a marked contrast between the "war is hell" genre, recently depicted in Oliver Stone's *PLATOON* and Stanley Kubrick's *FULL METAL JACKET*, and the glistening muscularity and male camaraderie of a "war is glory" film like *TOP GUN*. Both *PLATOON* and *FULL METAL JACKET* seem to depend on a documentary-style approach to fictional film. They refuse the mythical or allegorical aspect of *APOCALYPSE NOW* or the convoluted, heavily ironic plot of *THE DEER HUNTER*.

Like earlier films, especially *BATTLE CRY* and *TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH*, *PLATOON* does evoke the heroism and romance of men at war, but it also emphasizes the despair, violence, boredom, filth and drudgery experienced by soldiers who fought in Vietnam in the United States' longest war. In contrast, *FULL METAL JACKET*'s main character is a military journalist. In this film the Vietnam War is presented through the eyes of a "disinterested" observer. The film gives viewers none of the sense of participating vicariously in combat, as *PLATOON* does. However, *FULL METAL JACKET* does grip the viewer in its first section, which shows the cruelty of Marine basic training.

FOUL MOUTHED FASCINATION

FULL METAL JACKET shows the 1968 odyssey of one Marine, Private Joker, played by Matthew Modine, as he goes from bootcamp's hell to Vietnam's hell. The first part of the movie brilliantly depicts Marine basic training, showing the terror, anxiety, and confusion inflicted on recruits. We see recruits dehumanized and abused in a prison-like environment until they become "the few good men" the Marine Corps wants. The first 45 minutes of *FULL METAL JACKET* should be mandatory viewing for every young person thinking of joining the armed forces. It accurately previews the "world of shit" they will enter.

With all its horror, this segment is filled with a malicious but funny humor. Racial slurs, sexual comments, insults, and obscene instructions are screamed at the recruits by their demonic drill instructor. The instructor's verbal sadism is spellbinding in its outrageous, dazzlingly vulgar imagery. His torrent of words becomes a vicious, perverse joke. For example, the drill instructor tells a recruit to

clean a toilet until it's "so clean the Blessed Virgin Mary would be proud to take a dump in it." On another occasion, the D.I. promises that some day these recruits will shoot as accurately as the Texas Tower sniper who shot 13 people in Austin in 1966 or as Lee Harvey Oswald — both of whom learned their excellent marksmanship in the U.S. Marine Corps.

This riveting boot camp sequence ends falsely. The sardonic drill instructor gets shot by a crazed recruit, pushed over the edge by mistreatment, and the recruit then commits suicide. In fact, drill instructors do not die in boot camp; recruits do. According to the 1985 Department of Defense *Report of World Wide U.S. Active Duty Military Casualties*, between October 1979 and September 1985, over 8,500 military personnel died in training accidents. Many such accidents were caused by arrogant drill instructors determined to impress recruits with the need to be tough.

In *PLATOON*, director Oliver Stone has also pinpointed the language used by U.S. troops. *Fuck* becomes the prevailing verb, adjective, and adverb. And the language is defensively heterosexual. The GI's often use blatantly homophobic language, often calling each other cocksucker. The film shows the ambiguity in this type of language. A macho verbal stance appears as a defensive facade. Life in the combat zone is both womanless and sexually charged. And we see genuine affection among some members of the platoon, which here is expressed in a rare moment of calm and trust as some of the soldiers dance together to Smokey Robinson's "The Tracks of My Tears."

THROUGH THE PROTAGONISTS' EYES

In *PLATOON*, writer-director Stone drew on his experiences as a grunt, a U.S. infantryman in Vietnam. Apparently the film offers a fairly accurate account of Stone's own time spent "in-country." Charlie Sheen plays Taylor, the Stone character, a college dropout a few years older than the teenage draftees serving with him. A few more years of experience and that bit of college allow him to perceive the war intellectually and philosophically. The narrative traces Taylor's metamorphosis from a naive, callow volunteer into a brutal, yet seemingly still "honorable," soldier with some shreds of his sanity and humanity intact.

Stone depicts the details of U.S. soldiers fighting in Vietnam perfectly. He shows how soldiers tragically blurred Vietnamese civilians and "the enemy." The soldiers lived in the bush for weeks at a time, wearing the same set of scuzzy fatigues, always feeling dirty. They felt exhausted from humping six to ten kilometers each day with full pack and battle gear, and doing that for weeks at a time. Even 19-year olds felt like 65. The heat they felt was a baking, noxious climate in the cleared rear areas or a sodden, fetid presence in the jungle. You had swarms of mosquitoes around your head at night and felt disgust at finding leeches sucking your blood. You were afraid of being "in-country," afraid that your own ignorance and inexperience could kill you and others.

In contrast, after *FULL METAL JACKET* moves from boot camp to Vietnam, the film's vividness deteriorates. As in *PLATOON*, the protagonist in *FULL METAL JACKET* is enlightened and somewhat detached. But because he is scripted as a military journalist, Private Joker is given a more detached role, physically and emotionally, than *PLATOON*'s grunt narrator. When Joker is assigned to cover the story of a Marine combat company during the 1968 Tet Offensive, his role as

journalist rather than combatant distances us from feeling the "war" part of the film or from identifying with the mutual concern combatants had for each others' lives. Furthermore, in visual terms, the film follows *Joker* in his journalist role by its visual format. It presents a series of "television news interviews" with the soldiers, and all these sections come off as flat and staged.

FULL METAL JACKET is in many ways just another war movie, not an anti-war movie like *PLATOON*. Certainly there are problems with *PLATOON*. The narration gets preachy, and some scenes border on a John-Wayne-gung-ho sensibility. At the end of *PLATOON* we see a dedication: "To the men who fought and died in Vietnam." This insults all the women veterans who served there and the eight women whose names are listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Flaws aside, *PLATOON*'s uncompromising honesty is an eloquent, if violent, response to *RAMBO*. *PLATOON* does "teach others what we know" about the horror and futility that was Vietnam, the beast that is all war.

FULL METAL JACKET also refuses to glamorize war, and Kubrick tries to convey how absurd the military is as an institution. Marines in combat here come off as brave, honorable, and often confused. However, *FULL METAL JACKET* never looks at why we were in Vietnam in the first place or at the war's repercussions. It refuses to depict any Vietnamese sympathetically — only as killer, prostitute, and thief. Never does this film or any other popular U.S. film about the war explain the Vietnamese people and their struggle. In U.S. films, the Vietnamese merely provide a backdrop to our soldiers' macho posturing and ethical questioning.

In an interview in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, former real-life Marine drill instructor Lee Ermy, who played the nasty drill instructor in *FULL METAL JACKET* and acted as military advisor to Kubrick, stated the following:

"... nobody's going to convince me Kubrick hasn't made a great war movie, and an accurate one. If I thought there was a hint of bullshit that was against the war in Vietnam, if I'd thought he was making an antiwar film, I would've had nothing to do with the thing."

"... Kubrick was very interested in accuracy. He told me that he wanted to make a movie that was as close to being a documentary as possible."

I feel that as a documentary-style film, *FULL METAL JACKET* never succeeds in the way that *PLATOON* does. Not only do *FULL METAL JACKET*'s viewers feel uninvolved with plot and characters, but the sets also fail to convey any sense of Vietnam in the late 60s. It uses buildings that are too glitzy and stylized. Urban ruins here have a stagy, bombed-out grandeur but do little to impress us with war's destruction.

The film does show briefly the cruelty inflicted by U.S. troops, but for the most part our soldiers seem like goodhearted boys who, in spite of their intense training, have no idea how to conduct themselves in a war. In one sequence, a soldier is killed from a booby-trapped child's toy. No Marine I ever met was that dumb. For me, that went beyond any plausible suspension of disbelief. I am no military strategist, but if all our forces had acted as stupid as this group of Marines does when confronting a lone sniper, the war would have been over in 1965 rather than 1975.

I found the ending of FULL METAL JACKET especially difficult to deal with due to its insensitivity and inaccuracy. After a day spent in combat which has cost several Marines' lives, including that of a well-liked lieutenant and a beloved hospital corpsman, the company marches through spectacular, luridly flaming ruins, lustily singing the Mickey Mouse Club theme song. Here Kubrick was trying to show the absurd irony of the Vietnam War and perhaps the soldiers' emotional resilience. But veterans of any war would agree that combat deaths depress the survivors. Most Vietnam veterans still feel remorse over their comrades' deaths in Vietnam. I found this rousing chorus of M-i-c-k-e-y M-o-u-s-e at the end of FULL METAL JACKET upsetting and insulting.

In PLATOON, a GI states, "If you make it out of here, every day of the rest of your life is gravy." At the time, if a soldier did make it through a year's duty in Vietnam, it did seem as though the rest of his life would be gravy. I myself was a hospital corpsman with the First Marine Division in Vietnam from December 1969 to December 1970, and I still am concerned with the war as a social fact as I am an active participant in the Veterans Speakers Alliance. As we veterans always knew and by now the rest of the U.S. public has learned, none of our lives has been gravy. We've brutally felt as the war's legacy ostracism from mainstream society, Agent Orange's deadly effects, and post-traumatic stress disorder. But we vets also know about the obscene tragedy of war, a knowledge that most U.S. citizens lack. Our country is increasing its militarization, and we face an increasing possibility of war in Central America. As a vet, I am grateful that Oliver Stone shared this kind of knowledge in PLATOON, and I hope that his film helps prevent the next generation's becoming cannon fodder in another senseless war.

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Matewan. The Sicilian History, politics, style, and genre

by John Hess

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Two recent history films, John Sayles' *MATEWAN* and Michael Cimino's *THE SICILIAN* (based on Mario Puzo's post-*Godfather* novel), though very different, demonstrate the problematic interrelationship among history, politics, style, and genre in film. Both deal with class conflict in underdeveloped rural areas of otherwise developed countries. While making valuable observations about class oppression in those areas, they retreat from these original insights by imposing genre conventions on the historical material.

MATEWAN narrates events which took place in Logan and Mingo Counties, West Virginia, during a United Mine Workers organizing drive in the early 1920s. On May 20, 1920 a civic-minded sheriff and some striking miners shot it out with company goons hired from the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency (Coleman, 99). *THE SICILIAN* quite carefully describes the broader social context that gave rise to the infamous Sicilian bandit, Salvatore Giuliano, in the 1940s. Before I discuss these films' style and representation of history, I want to give brief plot summaries and set their events in their social and historical context.

MATEWAN

MATEWAN makes a sincere effort to document something important about U.S. labor history and its struggles. Many friends involved in trade union work felt buoyed by the film. Since I am an union organizer myself, I enjoyed seeing the organizing process presented in a mass distribution film. Joe Kenehan, a United Mine Workers organizer with a pacifist Wobbly background, arrives in Matewan, West Virginia in 1920 to organize the local miners. He finds the miners split along racial and ethnic lines — white, black, and Italian immigrants. The mine operators have hired thugs from the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency to keep their area nonunion.

With the special help of Few Clothes, a black miner played by James Earl Jones, Kenehan unifies the miners and takes them out on strike. Increasing tension and confrontation with armed goons lead to a brutal murder of one young miner, a shoot out in the woods, and a final showdown on the main street of Matewan. At a key moment, a company spy frames Kenehan. But just as the latter is to be shot by

Few Clothes, the truth of the frame-up, which Few Clothes suspected all along, comes out

Throughout, the local sheriff, Sid Hatfield, supports the miners and is the central figure in the shoot out. Kenehan, a pacifist, tries to stop the violence and dies in the shoot out. Danny, a young miner-preacher turned union man, carries Kenehan's legacy into the present. The preacher's voice (as an old man looking back on the events in 1920) narrates the film.

THE SICILIAN

THE SICILIAN tells Salvatore Giuliano's story from his first brush with the law in 1943 to his early, mysterious death in 1950. Combining accepted facts with equal measures of myth and Puzo's own ironic romanticization of the gangster figure, the film weaves together the major events — first brush with the law, assembling his band, increasing fame, massacre at Portella della Ginestra, mysterious death — and the major historical characters — his cousin and faithful companion Aspanu Pisciotta, the major Sicilian Mafia leader who protects Giuliano because he admires him, and the university professor who often acts as go-between in Giuliano's career.

APPALACIA AND SICILY

Both films deal with mysterious and exotic underdeveloped areas in advanced capitalist countries. These areas supply not only raw materials and cheap labor but also the stuff of myth to the more advanced areas of their countries. Appalachia and Sicily developed in relative isolation (or more properly, hardly developed at all) up to the moment these films cover. The people there have a culture, including dialect speech, that is very foreign to the rest of the country. Carlo Levi's *Impressions of Sicily*, written in the early 1950s, reads very much like books now being written about trips to third world countries (and includes a very different view of the Mafia than Puzo's novel and Cimino's film).

As brutally exploited regions, Appalachia and Sicily fostered very violent social relations. At the level of personal and family relations, the Mafia bears a striking resemblance to the Hatfields and the McCoys. And agencies like the Baldwin-Felts protected the wealthy in the same way the Mafia did in Sicily. A culture of violence combined with a culture of hunting as a means of survival, and both traditions produced an armed populace. Furthermore, in each historical case, a major war had just ended, with many combat veterans returning to their communities.

Both films concern moments of violent change as these areas get dragged into the 20th century. And these changes set in motion violent contradictions to which people responded in different ways. In the early 1920s the minefields of Logan and Mingo counties were almost completely nonunion and a United Mine Workers organizing drive was showing some success. At this time, over half of the coal miners in West Virginia were union (Lane, 20). The coal operators in Mingo and Logan counties protected their interests by turning the area into an armed camp, buying off politicians, sending out labor spies, and bringing in Black miners and Italian immigrants to cause dissention.

Sid Hatfield, a distant relative of the famous Hatfields, and sheriff of Matewan

resisted the operators and defended the civil rights of the organized miners. Why Hatfield did this, the movie does not show other than attributing it to reasons of personal pride. Such a defense of striking miners would not have been possible or even conceivable prior to the union organizing effort. Hatfield is a man caught between contending forces and ultimately crushed by them.

In the 1930s, Mussolini had tried to crush the Mafia in Sicily. When Sicily was "liberated" by U.S. and British forces in 1943, the U.S. forces of occupation brought in major Mafia figures as liaison people to run local government. These Mafiosi quickly regained their old hegemony and turned Sicily into a major drug processing and transportation center.

But the war liberated other forces as well. Community organizers like Danio Dolci and Communist peasant leaders like Pia de la Torre began organizing the peasants to take possession of the large tracts of uncultivated land on the island. The postwar government in Rome had passed an agrarian reform law, but the Mafia helped the landowners prevent implementation. Previously, a man like Salvatore Giuliano would have become just another soldier for the Mafia. But in 1946 opposing forces contended for his adherence: a monarchist-based popular separatist movement, the Mafia, and an organized peasantry. How this struggle is resolved is the story of Salvatore Giuliano (Maxwell).

Cimino, following Puzo, adds to the story Giuliano's personal relationship with a peasant organizer. He is a minor character, a boyhood acquaintance and the brother of Salvatore's young wife. Giuliano's men kill him during the infamous massacre at Portella della Ginestra on the first of May, 1947. Neither the young wife nor the organizer brother seems to have existed in real life. In the film, the organizer stands as the stereotypical leftist: thin, intense, talkative, idealistic, and impractical.

By inventing the organizer and giving Giuliano a sympathetic personal relation to him, Puzo/Cimino cover over Giuliano's extreme right-wing, anti-communist politics. In real life it seems that Giuliano, who had a great popularity with Sicily's peasants became manipulated by various mafia-dominated separatist and monarchist groups as well as by various government figures. The right needed a popular figure to offset the rising popularity of the Communist Party and of the People's Bloc of which it was a major part. The tragedy of Giuliano's life is this: despite his apparent sympathy for the peasantry, his anti-communism prevented him from actually joining them.

In the April, 1947, elections for the Sicilian Regional Parliament, the People's Bloc outpolled all other parties with 30% of the vote. The ruling Christian Democrats received several hundred thousand less votes, and the monarchists and separatists lagged way behind. Attacking the communists became the highest priority for the right, and Giuliano enlisted willingly in their campaign. Soon thereafter he and his men attacked the May Day feria at Portella della Ginestra, killing 11 and wounding 33. Many of the dead and wounded were women and children.

Debate continues to swirl around this event and especially Giuliano's role. He claimed the deaths were an accident and there is much evidence to indicate this is true. In the film, one of his lieutenants who was bought off by the Mafia causes the massacre. Yet afterwards Giuliano's band continued to attack Communist and

Socialist Party headquarters and distribute anti-left leaflets.

Puzo, and Cimino after him, clean up Giuliano's act for him, romanticizing him and painting him as a Sicilian Robin Hood and disillusioned, idealistic, romantic hero. This distortion of history does violence to the complexity of Sicily's situation and makes it impossible really to understand the contending forces.

Eric Hobsbawm sheds further light on this subject. He finds a recurring pattern of banditry appearing in rural societies that have social extremes of rich and poor, powerful and weak. Banditry is a phenomenon which has a very traditional, pre-capitalist structure. It thrives on backwardness and is threatened by capitalist production relations and the kinds of peasant organizing that industrialization brings in its wake. For example, Giuliano was from Montelepre, one of Sicily's most backward areas. Social banditry arises most forcefully during periods of social tumult — war, famine, major social change — such as the period during and after the Second World War in Sicily.

Much like today's guerrillas, social bandits must align themselves with the rural poor, whether they begin with this ideology or not. The bandit will rob the rich to feed the poor among whom he lives. Hobsbawm writes,

"He is virtually obliged to, for there is more to take from the rich than from the poor, and if he takes from the poor or becomes an 'illegitimate' killer, he forfeits his most powerful asset, public aid and sympathy"(19).

Giuliano was a man whose beliefs about justice and whose ideals were close to those of the organized peasants, but he was used and then thrown away by mafia-controlled separatist forces. His story illustrates a kind of contradiction that we can see at moments of great change, and this contradiction is, politically speaking, the most fascinating thing about Giuliano's brief life.

TWO FILMS/TWO STYLES

These films could hardly be more different in style. Sayles, noted for his flatfooted style, has made a cliché-ridden film that moves very slowly and predictably. It often approaches filmed theater with unnecessarily long scenes with the actors in set positions — around the table in the boarding house, meeting in the general store, around the camp fire — and dependent on conversations to move it forward. It is a very verbal film, reflecting Sayles' considerable experience and skill as a writer. The visuals contribute little except the period look. Usually a brief series of short bits of action or short scenes connect these major scenes.

MATEWAN has a tight, cramped feel to it, reflecting the poverty and oppression of the people and the setting in Appalachian hollows. As the film depicts the mine, boarding house, general store, and the miners' tents after they are evicted, it shows small and cramped spaces. Even outdoors buildings, surrounding trees and hills screen off and block our view. I remember only one shot which contained a vista. Two boys climb up a hill and pause to look out over a river valley receding into the distance.

Haskell Wexler's photography looks somewhat like the depression-era photography of Dorothea Lange, Paul Strand, and Walker Evans. Yet in Sayles'

search for what he calls "psychological realism," (72) as opposed to documentary realism, the film uses much diffused light and molding of faces. Kennehan's face is usually in full light, while the villains' faces are often in half or full shadow. Visually, the film seems split between its search for "naturalness" and its use of Hollywood conventions.

Visually, *THE SICILIAN* reminded me of *HEAVEN'S GATE*. The luxurious color photography is expansive and dynamic. The camera often stays in motion as do the people. Giuliano rarely stands still and the camera follows him. Giuliano (and the camera) look down on the ancient Sicilian villages from his mountain retreat. His band swoops down to rob, assassinate, free jailed prisoners, fight the carabinieri, and then returns to the mountains. Many long shots show huge expanses of the Sicilian landscape. The visual aspect of the scenes usually tells more about the interactions than what people say.

We see much posturing and posing in this film. The poses include that of the vulnerable, sorrowing artist looking out over the mist-covered valleys and the massed blocking of powerful armed men reminiscent of gangster films and westerns. Stylistically, Cimino often seems caught between an intense dynamism and epic sweep, on the one hand, and static poses, on the other. Robin Wood sees in these and other dislocations in Cimino's films a sort of Brechtian distancing that hopes to break the headlong flow of the narrative. While this seems likely, these static poses are also the most conventional images in the film. They indicate to me an inability to follow along where the contradictions he has fairly clearly revealed would lead. In a sense they stop the action and prevent further insight.

Stylistically, then we can see Sayles and Cimino caught in an opposing, but equally failed dialectic. Cimino tries to stop dynamic movement with conventionally posed images of power or reflection. Sayles tries to dynamize static scenes with bits of unconvincing action. The unresolved contradiction between the static and dynamic, the inability to integrate the two at the level of style, reveals, I think, an inability to resolve the political contradictions they approach, but back away from.

TWO FILMS/SIMILAR POLITICS

Films about the past are actually films about the present. What do Sayles and Cimino say about our present world with these films about past worlds? What vision do they have? Both films seem split between a fairly progressive intent or vision of history (e.g., both clearly define how class oppression works) and the demands of the Hollywood film (e.g., both collapse their class perspective into personal action, psychology, and genre conventions).

Both these filmmakers seem to express differing versions of left-liberal politics. That is, they accept/see that the status quo is corrupt and destructive, in large part because it depends on class oppression, on stark differences between rich and poor, powerful and weak. Organization, agitation, and even revolt by the lower classes (miners in *MATEWAN* and peasants in *THE SICILIAN*) would be justified and is probably inevitable. Yet both filmmakers back away from the full implications of this insight. I will argue that they do this by uncritically imposing Hollywood conventions onto the historical material.

Both films present fairly accurate pictures of the historical moment's class

dynamics. They give all the information needed to come to a fairly clear Marxist understanding of these historical moments. Yet, without a Marxist understanding of class dynamics and history, their vision goes only so far. They see these events through a class filter, from a privileged perspective. Each film offers a point of view not from the "people," but from men who are both onlookers and participants.

The filmmakers draw back from their insights in two additional ways. First, as I showed above, they change, distort, and suppress certain historical facts that would strengthen a class analysis. Second, as I will discuss below they superimpose a story of romantic heroes, fighting against impossible odds, doomed to inevitable defeat. In this tradition of bourgeois and some left art as well, defeat in the material/social world becomes compensated for by spiritual victory. Joe Kenehan's legacy will be taken up by Danny. Giuliano's child (made up by Puzo) and a mysterious young boy who bids him farewell at the end offer some hope that his struggle (whatever that actually is) will continue.

In both films the hope, the spiritual victory remains very vague. What Danny actually learned about unionizing is unclear. How Giuliano's unborn child and the mysterious young boy will carry on for Giuliano or what that would actually mean cannot be known. How different are Lucia's unborn child in the second part of Humberto Solás' *LUCIA* (Cuba, 1968) and the young girl who watches Lucia and her estranged husband fight and argue on the beach in the film's third part.

Here we clearly understand that those who will carry on are beginning at a very different historical level, *because of the actions of their parent's generation*. Here, youth represents the next lurch of the dialectic. Lucia 2's unborn child could be Lucia 3, as the girl watching that battle of the sexes could become Lucia 4. Solás has made a film about how old values linger on in new social situations and also how old values are changed. I see no such dialectical movement in either *MATEWAN* or *THE SICILIAN* even though the historical material they are based on could easily supply it.

MATEWAN: HEROIC PESSIMISM

MATEWAN tells about a series of failures. Sayles advocates non-violence, but seems pessimistic about this strategy. Though Joe does manage to forge a kind of unity among the miners, this unity — the miners' strength — leads inevitably to the armed conflict and to Joe's own death. Joe has an heroic intent, but does not accomplish very much or have much impact on the miners except on his protégé, Danny.

As Sayles describes his hero, Joe Kenehan is

"not a slogan-spouting Marxist with a book education, not a little Indian guy in white robes preaching a kind of mystic Eastern acceptance, not a stranger at all but just about the most regular fella you'd want to meet..."(17).

Leaving aside the silliness of Sayles' phobias, Joe comes off as boring as Sayles makes him sound. Joe has none of the interesting flaws and contradictions that the organizers do in *SALT OF THE EARTH* or *NORMA RAE*. What he gains in just-one-of-the-guys reality he loses in intensity and credibility. We don't see him die in

the climactic shoot out, we only stumble on his body afterwards. Sayles' hesitation comes in how the director deals issues of violence.

"The two most successful creations of U.S. movies are the gangster and the Westerner: men with guns. Guns as physical objects, and the postures associated with their use, form the visual and emotional center of both types of films." — Robert Warshaw

Sayles sets as the crucial enigma: "Can he get justice for the miners without a gun?" (17) Sayles wants to question violence and Joe, with his pacifist background, argues against any violence. In the same connection, Sayles rejects both the socialist and communist traditions in U.S. labor even though they have been mostly responsible for the gains labor has made. He implies, it would seem, that these traditions advocate or have caused violence. Sayles becomes caught up in a contradiction of his own making. He understands and shows in the film that the system itself is a form of violence as it is the subjugation of one class by another. Yet, the question of violence is addressed in the film as a matter of individual choice: Joe rejects it and the sheriff takes up the gun in his defense.

Thus, Sayles cheats on this issue. He tries to have his cake and eat it too. Joe upholds his pacifist beliefs and dies a martyr in the main street of Matewan. His protégé, Danny (our narrator Pappy as a youth) lowers his rifle and lets a Baldwin goon escape across the river. Pacifism preserved! Yet at several points in the film armed men — Sid Hatfield several times and some strange hill people out hunting — save Joe from serious trouble with the goons, Hickey and Griggs. Sid Hatfield and the armed miners shoot down a whole bunch of Baldwin goons. Alma, the Matewan widower who befriends Joe, gets to give the repulsive Hickey both barrels and splatter him all over her clean laundry. And Mrs. Elkins, whose young son was brutally murdered by the Baldwins, pumps pistol shots into a Baldwin thug as he lies in the Street. Violence redeemed! Vengeance is sweet!

THE SICILIAN: ROMANTIC PESSIMISM

According to Cimino, Giuliano strives to live a life of purity, fighting the corrupt forces around him for a higher ideal. Yet his very effort to live and create purity leads to corruption. By joining neither the left or the right (in the film!) Giuliano hopes to remain above the contending forces. Yet at the same time, only protection from the most powerful Sicilian Don protects him and permits him to operate. It is not hard to see in this situation, as portrayed by Cimino, the traditional "neutral" position of the petty bourgeoisie — neutrality dependent on class privileges.

Giuliano's Robin Hood fantasy, his inability to understand or even begin to imagine his actual situation, leads to the massacre of peasants at Portella della Ginistra. Like previous Cimino characters — Stanley White in *YEAR OF THE DRAGON* and Jim Averill in *HEAVENS GATE* — Giuliano thinks he's in control because of his personal qualities of goodness and good intentions, but he finds that, in fact, he has little or no control of the forces that oppose him. As in *HEAVEN'S GATE*, in *THE SICILIAN* enlightenment comes only at the end of the film, when it is too late to do anything about it. The only alternative is a self-willed death at the hands of his cousin and closest friend, Aspanu Pisciola.

POINT OF VIEW: NOT WITH THE PEOPLE

In both films, the controlling point of view is not from the people but from an individual who stands somewhat to the side of the action, a participant/ observer, who is also a local intellectual and thus exercises a "superior" point of view. Once again we can see the analogy with the position of the petty bourgeoisie — not one of the contending parties (bourgeoisie and proletariat), but between them.

In MATEWAN the controlling point of view belongs to Danny/ Pappy the preacher (i.e. local intellectual) who looks back nostalgically on the hard days of his youth.

"The miners was trying to bring in the union to West Virginia and the coal operators and their gun thugs was set on keeping 'em out" (Sayles, 4).

In the SICILIAN the professor (also a local intellectual) is the liaison between his former student Giuliano and the Mafia Don. His cynicism and pessimism about any meaningful change control the tone of the film.

Both films begin at the end, looking back at events from a future perspective. This structure emphasizes the "historical" aspect of the films, and signal that we are seeing events that have clearly passed. But such a structure also creates a sense of inevitability, necessity, and destiny — a sense that little or nothing can be done to change the course of human history. Such a perspective tells history as if it is only the precursor of today, leads directly to current events. This teleological view tends to minimize the contradictions of history, seeing instead only the flow toward the present. The backward looking narration also necessitates the distortion and suppression of historical fact, as we will see below.

Pappy's occasional voice-over narration sets the action in the past and emphasizes the "history lesson" aspect Sayles wants to give. In the end Pappy learned the lesson Joe wanted to impart:

"'Hit's just one big Union, the whole world over,' Joe Kenehan used to say, and from the day of the Matewan Massacre that's what I preached. That was my religion" (Sayles, 180).

THE SICILIAN begins with Giuliano's body being thrown out of a car onto a Church's steps. A *Carabiniere* officer then stands over the body and riddles it with machine-gun fire. Then a radio announcer describes the fast-breaking events. The professor rides through Palermo, its walls covered with posters and graffiti celebrating Giuliano, and enters the Ucciardone Prison. We do not know the meaning of this shot until the end when we realize that the professor was going to poison Aspanu in prison. (All this comes at the end of Puzo's novel; Cimino moved it to the front.)

GENRE EXPECTATIONS

Both films are semi-genre movies. Sayles structured MATEWAN on the classic Hollywood western, and THE SICILIANS is a gangster film (more accurately, a subgenre, the rural bandit film, like BONNIE AND CLYDE). Both films rely on standard genre icons. In MATEWAN the sheriff faces down the bad guys, cleans and loads his gun in preparation for the battle, and the men are arrayed on main street for the shoot out. In THE SICILIAN we see the gangster arrayed in formation

with his men, Giuliano's body tossed out on the church's steps, and informers ritually executed.

Sayles says he used the western film conventions to structure his film in such a way to make it more popular to a general audience. This film was his effort to move out of the marginality in which his prior films have been successful. Cimino has made a war film (DEER HUNTER), an urban cop thriller (YEAR OF THE DRAGON), a western (HEAVENS GATE), and now THE SICILIAN. While there is a contradiction between an accurate portrayal of history and especially of historical change, on the one hand, and the conventions and audience expectations of the genre film, on the other, I don't see any inherent reason why a genre film cannot deal with the complexity of history.

Yet genre films that try to deal with history in a dialectical way break out of the rigid rules of the genre, use the genre film as a base to move out from in some way. Francesco Rossi's LUCKY LUCIANO has many gangster film attributes, yet it mostly follows the detective as he builds his case against Luciano. Segments of reports are reconstructed within the film as the detective narrates them and even bits of newsreel footage are included. GODFATHER II uses alternating time segments to contrast the past and the present and thus more effectively show the changes in the family and in its social context.

As Robin Wood points out, Cimino's own, much maligned HEAVEN'S GATE counters the genre expectations of the western to make important statements about U.S. class relations. Many of the better Cuban films have found intriguing ways to undermine the genre form they begin with or use the shell of. BAY OF PIGS (Manuel Herrera, 1972) uses the Hollywood war film to recount the Cuban success at the Bay of Pigs. War film conventions are mixed with personal accounts of participants at the very site of their participation. LUCIA parodies the historical costume drama in part 1, the gangster film in part 2, and, in part 3, the rural musical romance film. THE OTHER FRANCISCO (Sergio Giral, 1975) turns a realistic literary adaptation/ historical recreation upside down by questioning the origins of the original story and telling another version (the "other Francisco").

In MATEWAN and THE SICILIANS Sayles and Cimino begin with historical actuality, but, backing away from their original insights, they impose genre conventions on films that don't need them. Using the genre conventions (and larger Hollywood conventions as well) as they do, undermines the political possibilities their films promise and contains the contradictions they open up.

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Wildrose Niceness isn't enough

by Rob Silberman

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WILDROSE raises an odd but important question: Is it possible for a film to be too nice for its own good? Directed by John Hanson, WILDROSE tells the story of June Lorch (played by Lisa Eichorn of YANKS and CUTTER'S WAY/ CUTTER AND BONE) and Rick Ogaard (Tom Bower of THE WALTONS and THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ), co-workers on the Iron Range in northern Minnesota. After they fall in love they must face the difficulties of combining love and work. When they are laid off, they are faced with new pressures because Rick moves back to Bayfield, Wisconsin to fish commercially on Lake Superior while June looks for a job and waits to be rehired at the mine. She spends time with Rick, but the movie ends with her returning to the Iron Range following news that the mine is about to reopen. As even this brief synopsis indicates, the movie addresses central issue of the 80s, especially for working women in the U.S. — the relation between the professional and the personal.

The filmmakers proceeded in an exemplary fashion from the start of the project, when they moved to the site community for a couple of years in order to acquaint themselves thoroughly with life there. And at the end of the film, they list the townspeople and organizations that helped them in credits which Hanson rightly describes as almost as long as the phonebook. The film premiered in the town of Virginia on the Range, a further sign of how responsible the filmmakers felt toward these communities. WILDROSE clearly has its heart in the right place. Yet I don't think that is enough.

WILDROSE was shot in seven weeks at a cost of approximately one and a half million dollars. It's a tiny sum by Hollywood standards but a lot of money for an independent production. Understandably a filmmaker embarking on such a project might become cautious or overcautious. In a media world of compromises and sensationalism, Hanson has accomplished a lot. Yet WILDROSE lacks the vitality and daring that compensate for many independent productions' roughness, including NORTHERN LIGHTS, Hanson's first feature (made with Rob Nilsson).

Hanson has said in an interview that in WILDROSE he consciously ruled out trying to be inventive. I assume he meant "innovative" in the sense of technically or cinematically original. In any case, the film's originality lies mainly in its attempt to

avoid as many of Hollywood film's objectionable aspects as possible. That *via negativa* could lead to filmmaking radically different from Hollywood-style production. It can also lead, as WILDROSE for the most part demonstrates, to relatively conventional filmmaking, purged only of excess sex or violence. Hanson falls back on an old-fashioned kind of love story about two people "made for each other." If it takes a while for their affection to become evident, their transformation from initial dislike to love, far from being surprising or dramatic, is predictable and has been seen in many Hollywood films.

GOOD INTENTIONS

WILDROSE, however, aims to do more than just entertain. In fact, the film's most serious problem arises directly out of its earnest good intentions. In their effort to be morally and politically correct, the filmmakers have fallen into a familiar trap. They made a film that is at times little more than the acting-out of an ideological diagram. These days, films that aspire to seriousness keep running into trouble. Almost by definition, a Serious Film deals with an Issue and therefore Makes a Statement. Even WILDROSE, which does everything possible to disguise its political underpinnings, remains fatally wounded by the way in which it is a Relationships Film about a Single Working Woman faced with an Important Decision, bothered by an Abusive Husband, supported by a Mentor-Survivor, and unsure about how to deal with a Caring but Nevertheless Independent Man. In other words, WILDROSE, like most serious films, is beset by what might be called the demon of overdetermination. Everything seems transparently allegorical. Apart for its use of amateur actors, WILDROSE is not far removed from Hollywood melodramas, ORDINARY PEOPLE or COUNTRY, or the best social-problem made-for-TV movies.

WILDROSE suffers from uneven acting, directing, and especially screenwriting. Hollywood actors — but not major stars — were used for the leads, supported by a few professional actors from the Twin Cities. The rest of the parts were played by amateurs drawn from the community. This approach inevitably limited Hanson's dramatic options even as it may have buttressed his claims to realism or to a satisfactory relation with the community. Moreover, in attempting to capture his characters' Midwestern restraint, Hanson has run up against a kind of understatement that does not come off as dramatic unless captured perfectly. I admire Lisa Eichorn's performance for its seeming authenticity, free of "hype" or glamour and all the more attractive for it. But that performance is not easy to read.

There is fine sensitivity at work in many of the scenes with the secondary characters. The movie is all but stolen by 80-year old Lydia Olson who looks like an aged Linda Hunt and plays Katri, obviously the survivor figure and June's mentor. Katri is awarded the key last line of the film: "A woman has to listen to her own voice." We see equally good minor encounters between June and her parents — her mother thinks June is taking jobs away from men — and between June and Rick's family when they all get introduced to each other during a fishboil.

Hanson is at his best with informal banter and low-key scenes. When he tries to go for the big scene, however, he gets into trouble. Most notably the film has a disappointing lovemaking scene, when June's "problem" — that is, her former husband, Billy — gets introduced. And there's a contrived climactic scene in which Billy comes in drunk and after a battle June triumphantly throws him out. These

scenes attempt a pair of tricky reversals, replacing sensationalistic sex scenes with anti-sexist love scenes, gratuitous or macho violence with defensive counter-violence.

Hanson does not seem to have a satisfactory answer to the question of how one combines mainstream Hollywood production values with alternative approaches to storytelling. With relatively little sex and violence to propel the narrative, the film falls back on picturesque photography — e.g. the fishing boat on the lake — and stacy confrontations demonstrating ideological positions. One can hear the filmmakers saying, "We need a scene to show what it means to have an abusive husband. We'll have the woman building a log cabin in the woods as a symbol of her struggle to live her own life." (Hanson said that he put the log cabin in simply because many single women on the Iron Range are building them. But in the context of the broader culture, its use suggests a perfect yuppie fantasy for the 80s, a trendy variation on Virginia Woolf's thesis that creative women need a room of their own.)

SEXISM AND ECONOMICS

Since the two main figures are obviously compatible no matter what the initial tensions, the film's real drama arises from two other sources of tension — both political issues. First, there is the problem of male sexism as represented by the leering, goading co-workers at the mine and by the former husband. And second, there is the instability of the economic situation in the mine (open pit, not deep shaft).

Because WILDROSE's script deals with an abusive husband and overt sexism in the workplace, it is an important achievement. But it makes its argument less telling by creating villains easy to write off as Cro-Magnon creeps. Their sexism stands outright on the surface. The film would have made a greater contribution if it had dramatized the kinds of sexism that are not immediately apparent. For example, this brief exchange at a union meeting illustrates the film's problem. One of June's chauvinist co-workers suggests that the easiest solution to the economic crisis would be to get the women out of the mine. His sidekick then says, "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard. That's got nothing to do with the issues." Such a mechanical exchange leaves the movie with its didacticism showing. It also stops far short of providing any significant comment upon either sexism or the economic "issues."

Hanson now believes that he erred by not concentrating more on the organizer's wife in NORTHERN LIGHTS. (There was one high-pitched scene in which she complained about her lot.) In WILDROSE, however, Hanson has not simply shifted from "politics" to "relationships" or abandoned traditional politics for sexual politics. He said,

"The main theme isn't workers and management struggling ... I was interested in the problems created between men and women when they are working together in an industrial situation and trying to have a relationship." [1]

This sounds at first like a rejection of the classical (and crude?) foundation for political, i.e., Marxist, filmmaking — an economic and social exposition of class

struggle. Hanson wants to apply a more comprehensive definition of politics — in Hanson's terms, one that covers all human relations, not just organizational structures. Yet Hanson keeps a key element of the classical model. He chooses an industrial situation, with blue-collar workers at the center of the action. And obvious indications of his politics remain, as in this bit of changing-room dialogue at the mine:

"Heard anything?"

"Oh, they never tell us anything."

"That's for sure."

The scene then shifts to a woman crying in front of her locker: she has been told she is three days short of the seventy she would have needed to avoid being laid off.

In films as in real life, the issue of who in U.S. society is or considers him or herself a worker remains unclear (leaving aside such obvious balderdash as White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan's statement when he was Secretary of the Treasury that people making \$50,000 a year or more — 10% of the population — are "middle-class" and all others are "working people").

Clearly Hanson focuses primarily on the traditional working class and has broken new ground only by introducing a woman worker. Hanson traces the mine's closing no farther up the corporate ladder than to the foreman who must tell the workers about the lay-offs. Hanson doesn't really explore the relation between the miners and the other townspeople. As usual in movies, nobody talks national and international politics — discussing politicians or political parties or even the day's news.

In showing Rick going to work on his own boat out of Bayfield, Hanson presents an idealized projection of economic independence and rugged male individualism. It's worthy of a Camel cigarette ad, in spite of Rick's comments about how cold and rough the lake can get in winter. When Ogaard is forced to return to fishing instead of working in the mine, he also lands in the best of all possible briar patches. By way of contrast, we see a scene in a bar where a former antagonist tells June that he's been to Arizona and not found work, or again a female friend telling June that she's going to Oklahoma: "There's nothing up here. The Range is dead."

"I'm staying right here," June replies, and she tells Rick why later. "It's not just a job. The Range is my home." The sentiment and the determination with which June speaks ring true, yet such few cut-and-dried lines do not lead to the audience's more complex or profound awareness of the problem or, more to the point, to successful drama.

The continued hard times on the Iron Range really do threaten the existence of a community with a rich social heritage. Many people have lost not just their houses but their homes. Yet I suspect that at the time of its release (June '84) WILDROSE was already out of key with the larger public's perception of the economy as "prosperity," however shaky it was and however much poverty, unemployment, and suffering the rosy Reagan version of that "prosperity" has concealed. WILDROSE seems clearly a product of the unproclaimed recession of 1982 and 1983, although the original script indicated full employment and was changed only after the major layoffs started. Mine workers and other industrial laborers have not

received the recent media attention farmers have. Perhaps industrial workers have always been regarded ambivalently, without the aura that surrounds the family farm. That is one reason among many why WILDROSE did not attain even the limited success of Hollywood's recent farm films, with all their weaknesses.

In fact, none of the current spate of films about economic hard times and the stressed human relations that result come close to the power of John Ford's *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* or *HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY*. This is due to changed historical circumstances and changed artistic possibilities (apart from the fact that few directors have Ford's skill). Possibly archetypal, representative families and figures no longer convince because such fictional representations seldom match the immediacy and power of newspaper and television documentary reports.

Like Wayne Wang's *CHAN IS MISSING*, WILDROSE suggests a disguised documentary. Wang built his investigation of life in San Francisco's Chinatown around the search for Chan conducted by an odd couple of an old taxi driver and his young sidekick. Similarly, Hanson uses a love story as the basis for his portrait of Iron Range life, repeatedly introducing bits of local color: a Fourth of July parade, the fish boil, a polka Mass. These elements reflect the vision of a curious, if sympathetic outsider; they are not well integrated into the film. Les Blank wouldn't pass up a juicy subject like a polka Mass either, but in a documentary that kind of thing can exist on its own in a way that it cannot in a fictional work. In *NASHVILLE* and *TENDER MERCIES* the baptism scenes do work in the narrative, as do the wedding in *THE DEERHUNTER* and the barnraising in *WITNESS*. But in WILDROSE the documentary and the fictional never coalesce.

THE DEERHUNTER and WILDROSE bear comparison because they both focus on working-class ethnic communities and their rituals. *THE DEERHUNTER* is more violent and artificial, and racist to boot, but it also offers a far more moving glimpse of community. Because of the war, the characters have more at stake, and the love story is far more intense because it does not include a simple villain like the abusive Billy.

As WILDROSE avoids Hollywood's sexism, gratuitous violence, and escapism, it does not always avoid boredom. Maybe Hollywood's "Kiss kiss bang bang" blockbusters have made it difficult for audiences to accept smaller, quieter films. Nevertheless, I think Hanson would have been better off making an even more patient, deliberate, observant kind of film — a kind of film requiring the greatest subtlety and artistic skill to accomplish. Victor Nuñez's early short, *CHARLES BENSON'S RETURN TO THE SEA*, and Wayne Wang's *DIM SUM*, which acknowledges its debt to Ozu, do this. On the other hand, Hanson might have tried to make a livelier, no-holds-barred film, though that might have required a greater willingness to experiment with the narrative and perhaps the use of an all-professional cast.

In the scale of the production, WILDROSE does mark a clear step forward from *NORTHERN LIGHTS*. Yet often the camera setups dissipate some scenes' energy, as with a quarrel played out in the street to the neighbors' surprise and bewilderment. Other times, the use of slow-motion seems "artsy" and some of the images of the landscape are all too refined, leaving me wanting less scenery and more drama. I realize Hanson is showing the effect of the environment upon the characters. The Range provides a striking combination of beautiful scenery and

images of the mines' devastation and power. Mines frequently loom up in the background, even behind a parade or softball game. Still, no scene excited me as much as the threshing sequence in *NORHTERN LIGHTS*; no scene moved me as much as the shot of the father in the same film, drinking and singing beneath a scarecrow with the wind howling on the soundtrack.

Ending on freeze-frame, *WILDROSE* leaves the outcome of the lovers' personal situation up in the air although, as Hanson has said, it seems likely that they will work out their problems and somehow manage to get together in the future. This reassuring suggestion is perfectly in keeping with the warm-hearted attitude taken by the director throughout. Yet it also perhaps indicates the underlying sentimentality of the movie, its unwillingness to admit the possibility of personal or communal failure, to be truly open-ended.

The final credits roll over an aerial shot that takes us rapidly over the town. Like the opening shot of *THE DAY AFTER* this image is emotionally powerful, not just because it grabs the viewer like a Cinerama rollercoaster ride but because of what it suggests about the plenitude of life down below. *WILDROSE* never quite matches the energy and richness of that shot; it never quite puts the whole community together convincingly.

WILDROSE's strength lies in its fundamental decency and its low-key, modest approach to filmmaking. John Hanson has gone from a short documentary to a black and white feature film looking like a documentary (both done with Rob Nilsson) to a longer feature shot in color. He has not gone Hollywood. He has not done TV commercials.

He says, "I can't do fluff." He has doggedly gone his own way, listening to his own voice, and I admire him for it.

Yet *WILDROSE* is a film more to be admired and supported for what it tries to than to be enjoyed for what it actually does.

NOTES

1. The statements by John Hanson are drawn mainly from "WILDROSE: Strikes, Love, Layoffs," an interview conducted by Al Milgrom and printed in *Interlock*, the quarterly of the University Film Society (Minneapolis), Spring 1985, P. 4.

The comment about the film credits was made by Hanson at a screening of *WILDROSE* at the Cedar Theater in Minneapolis; the comment about the film's ending is in "Wildrose Director Hanson Thrilled by Reaction" by Sandy Davis, *Mesabi Daily News*, Sunday, April 29, 1984, two days after the film's premiere.

WILDROSE is distributed by TROMA, 733 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY, 10019. (212) 757-4555. We thank the producers, New Front Films, for the stills used with this review.

Black women's responses to *The Color Purple*

by Jacqueline Bobo

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CRITICAL RESPONSES

Tony Brown, a syndicated columnist and the host of the television program *Tony Brown's Journal* has called the film *THE COLOR PURPLE* "the most racist depiction of Black men since *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* and the most anti-Black family film of the modern film era." Ishmael Reed, a Black novelist, has labeled the film and the book "a Nazi conspiracy." Since its premiere in December 1985, *THE COLOR PURPLE* provoked constant controversy, debate, and appraisals of its effects on the image of Black people in this country.

The film also incited a face-off between Black feminist critics and Black male reviewers. The women defend the work, or more precisely, defend Alice Walker's book and the right of the film to exist. Black males vehemently denounce both works and cite the film's stereotypical representations. In the main, adverse criticisms have revolved around three issues:

- that the film does not examine class,
- that Black men are portrayed unnecessarily as harsh and brutal; the consequences of this will be to further the split between the Black female and the Black male;
- that Black people as a whole are depicted as perverse, sexually wanton, and irresponsible.

In these days of massive cutbacks in federal support to social agencies, according to some rebukes, the film's representation of the Black family was especially harmful.

Most left publications, *The Guardian*, *Frontline*, and *In These Times*, denounced the film, but mildly. *The Nation*, in fact, commended the film and its director for fitting the work's threatening content into a safe and familiar form.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] Articles in the other publications praised particular scenes but on the whole disparaged the film for its lack of class authenticity. Black people of that era were poor, the left-wing critics stated, and Spielberg failed to portray that fact. (Uh-uh, says Walker. She said she wrote here about people who owned land, property and dealt in commerce.)

Jill Nelson, a Black journalist who reviewed the film for *The Guardian*, felt that the film's Black protestors were naive to think that

"at this late date in our history ... Hollywood would ever consciously offer Black Americans literal tools for our emancipation." [2]

Furthermore, Nelson, refuted the charge that the film would forever set the race back in white viewers' minds by commenting that most viewers would only leave the theatre commenting on whether or not they liked the film. Articles counter to Nelson's were published in a following issue of *The Guardian*, and they emphasized the film's distorted perspective on class and the ideological use to which the film would be put to show the Black family's instability.

The December premiere of *THE COLOR PURPLE* was picketed in Los Angeles by an activist group named the Coalition Against Black Exploitation. The group protested the savage and brutal depiction of Black men in the film. [3] That complaint was carried further by a Black columnist in *The Washington Post*, Courtland Milloy, who wrote that some Black women would enjoy seeing Black men shown as "brutal bastards," and that furthermore, the book was demeaning. Milloy stated:

"I got tired, a long time ago, of white men publishing books by Black women about how screwed up Black men are." [4]

Other hostile views about the film were expressed by representatives of the NAACP, Black male columnists, and a law professor, Leroy Clark of Catholic University, who called it dangerous. (When Ntzoze Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf* opened on Broadway in Fall 1976, the response from Black male critics was similar.)

Black female reviewers were not so critical of the film on gender issues. Although Barbara Smith attacked the film for its class distortions, she felt that "sexual politics and sexual violence" in the Black community were matters that needed to be confronted and changed. [5] Jill Nelson emphasized that those who did not like what the messenger (the film) said about Black men should look at the facts of the message. She cited the facts: Nearly 50% of all Black children are born to single mothers; 80% of Black mothers are single parents; nine and a half out of ten Black women that she knew received no support from their children's father; and most had been physically and mentally abused.

One Black woman who had seen the film was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that she knew many Celies when she was growing up in Sunflower County, Mississippi. She said that she, her mother and her aunts had all been beaten and brutalized by their husbands and that for her, the movie "just lifted a burden." She added:

"Black women should not be sacrificed for Black men's pride. Let the film roll." [6]

On April 6, 1986, Tony Brown opened his weekly TV talk show with the statement, "You either love or you hate *THE COLOR PURPLE*." He had titled this particular program about the film, "Purple Rage." [7] He had as panelists four men, and they

split as to whether the film positively or negatively portrayed Black people. Vernon Jarrett, introduced as a "veteran" reporter for the *Chicago Sun Times*, declared that making *PURPLE* was like "putting poison in ice cream." Armond White, a film critic on the *New York City-Sun*, called the film the best movie of the year, and then he was severely criticized by Jarrett, Brown and another member of the panel, Kwasi Geiggar. Geiggar heads the group Coalition Against Black Exploitation, and he adamantly repeated that the film was "the worst picture of the year."

Geiggar and Jarrett dominated the program, interrupting anyone on the panel or in the audience who supported the film. Tony Brown lent those two moral and physical support by taking away the microphone from anyone in the audience who wanted to tell why they liked the film. At one point in the show, White, who liked the film, had to interrupt Geiggar's denunciation of Black people for being so "ignorant" of their own history that they accepted the film's historical inaccuracies. White pointed out that there were no women on the panel. He said,

"An important issue about *THE COLOR PURPLE* is that it is a fiction, it's a fable, it's a fantasy. It's not simply a movie of Black social history. It is particularly a history of Black women. It is more about the oppression of Black women than about Black people."

Several women in the audience did not like the film. One took offense to how often the word "ugly" was used in the film. She said the film's promotional trailer used the moment when Shug sees Celie for the first time and says, "You sho' is ugly." She said angrily, "This sister with her strong Black features. Brothers and sisters for twenty and thirty years have been trying to turn around that standard of beauty in our community," meaning that standard that places a premium on white features. And she told Tony Brown: "We will have sisters turning to other sisters for comfort, physically and mentally." She was reacting to the lesbian relationship between Shug and Celie, saying that Black women will turn to other Black women sexually, rather than to Black men.

Two women in the audience stood firm in their approval of the film. Tony Brown tried to badger them into backing down and Geiggar continually interrupted them, but in the end they got out what they wanted to say. One said that she saw the movie, read the book and liked both: "I did not take it to be a social commentary on the Black race." She also said that the film, in fact, depicted a social reality. She explained that she worked with teenage girls:

"The teenage girls were doing role playing about incest in Black families for senior citizens in the Black community, and many of those women my grandmother's age said, 'you told my story, that really happened.'"

On April 25, 1986, on his talk show, Phil Donahue also examined the controversy around *THE COLOR PURPLE*. He had as a panelist Tony Brown, who repeated his view that the film was racist and harmed Black men. Other guests were Willis Edwards, the president of the Beverly Hills NAACP chapter; Donald Bogle, a film historian and author of the book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*; and Michele Wallace, a professor of Afro-American literature and creative writing at the University of Oklahoma and author of *Black Macho: The Myth of the Superwoman*.

Wallace stated here that the film had had some "positive feminist influences and some positive import for Black audiences in this country." Wallace also said that art should not be reduced to mere sociology:

"Art looks at extreme conditions of conflict and then attempts to transcend those conditions. I don't think it's a valid criticism of THE COLOR PURPLE that it doesn't speak to the life of the ordinary and average Black family. Art is not meant to do that."[8]

In an earlier article in *The Village Voice*, March 18, 1986, Michele Wallace was less charitable to the film. Although she gives a very lucid explication of Walker's novel, citing its attempt to "reconstruct Black female experience as positive ground," Wallace wrote of the film,

"Spielberg juggles film clichés and racial stereotypes fast and loose, until all signs of a Black feminist agenda are banished, or ridiculed beyond repair."

Wallace also noted the film used mostly cinematic types reminiscent of earlier films. She writes:

"Instead of serious men and women encountering consequential dilemmas, we're almost always minstrels, more than a little ridiculous; we dance and sing without continuity, as if on the end of a string. It seems white people are never going to forget Stepin Fetchit, no matter how many times he dies."[9]

Wallace both sees something positive in the film and points to its flaws. I agree with her in both instances, especially in her analysis of how it is predictable that the film

"has given rise to controversy and debate within the Black community, ostensibly focused on the eminently printable issue of the film's image of Black men."

In an attempt to explain why people liked COLOR PURPLE in spite of its sometimes clichéd characters, Donald Bogle, on the Donahue show, put it down to the novelty of seeing Black actors in roles not previously available to them:

"For Black viewers there is a schizophrenic reaction. You're torn in two. On the one hand you see the character of Mister and you're disturbed by the stereotype. Yet, on the other hand, and this is the basis of the appeal of that film for so many people, is that the women you see in the movie, you have never seen Black women like this put on the screen before. I'm not talking about what happens to them in the film, I'm talking about the visual statement itself. When you see Whoopi Goldberg in close-up, a loving close-up, you look at this woman, you know that in American films in the past, in the 1930s, 1940s, she would have played a maid. She would have been a comic maid. Suddenly, the camera is focusing on her and we say I've seen this woman some place, I know her."

It appears to me that one of the problems most of the film's reviewers have in

trying to analyze the film, with all of its faults, is to make sense of the overwhelming positive response from Black female viewers. When Bogle talks about viewers' schizophrenic reaction, he is also pointing to the confusion felt by critics and scholars.

DIFFERENT VIEWING STRATEGIES

That Black female viewers liked the film *THE COLOR PURPLE* is becoming increasingly evident. Although no one has taken a poll on this, word of mouth among my friends and family, as well as among Black women scholars, seems to indicate this. Barbara Christian, associate professor of Afro-American Studies at U.C. Berkeley and a close friend of Alice Walker, had advised Walker to sell the film rights to the novel. In May 1986 at the University of Oregon, Christian presented a paper entitled "Devisioning Alice Walker and Steven Spielberg," in which she offered a comparison of the novel and film. She talked about the different audiences for each work and how they shaped the structuring of each. She saw a vast difference between the audience to whom Walker was writing and "Hollywood's concept of a mass audience." Christian felt that Spielberg "de-radicalized" Walker's vision, which showed how a group of people, specifically Celie and the other characters in the novel, could transcend the abusive conditions of class exploitation, sexism and racism — with their perverse manifestations of incest, wife-beating and rape — to forge a sense of Black nationhood that is dependent on a healthy Black family. Christian felt that Spielberg sentimentalized the novel, made it less harsh, and made "the purple pink. Sentimentality replaces the passion for living." [10]

In talking about the audience response to the film, Christian said that she had been run ragged in the months between the premiere of the film and her talk at the University of Oregon, analyzing the book and the film. She said that she had spoken to a variety of gatherings across the country, from university groups to assemblages in churches. She emphatically stated that Black females adored the film despite Black middle-class intellectuals telling them that they should not like it. Christian said her mother had seen the film seven times.

One of the reasons Alice Walker sold the screen rights to her book was that she understood that people who would not read the book would go to see the film. Walker and her advisers thought that the book's critical message — about a young, abused, uneducated girl evolving into womanhood with a sense of her worthiness which she gained through her bonding with the other females around her — needed to be exposed to a wider audience than those who read books. Christian contends that the audience for the novel was a very specific one and one drastically different from the mass audience toward which the film is directed. Although the novel was not directed exclusively at Black women, those who shared a common cultural background and experience could more readily identify with the issues explored by a Black woman writer.

Identification with the film would have to be a different matter in that it was a commercial venture produced in Hollywood by a white male according to all of the tenets and conventions of commercial cultural production in this country. The manner in which an audience would respond to such a film would be varied, diverse and complex. I am especially concerned to analyze how Black females have responded to the film *THE COLOR PURPLE*. If I find that on the whole Black

females have found something progressive and useful in the film, it is crucial to understand how this could be possible from viewing a work that has been manufactured according to the encoding of dominant ideology.

Lawrence Grossberg in his "Strategies of Marxist Cultural Interpretation" contends that cultural texts can be read and used in different ways. Grossberg cites Stuart Hall's studies that contend that the processes of cultural production encode particular meanings into the structure of the texts. These "meanings" attempt to represent experience in ways which support the interests of those already in power, both economically and politically. The producers of a cultural product are under "ideological pressure" to reproduce the familiar. Even when the producer is being radical, the form of the presentation in most cases will be that of dominant ideology encoding.

Grossberg cautions, however, that the fact that texts encode certain readings does not guarantee that they are read accordingly. As he states, effects cannot be assumed from origins. There are alternate ways for an audience to decode a text other than that of the preferred one. There can be a negotiated and/or an oppositional reading. A *dominant* (or preferred) reading of a text accepts the content of the cultural product without question. A *negotiated* reading questions parts of the content of a text but does not question the dominant ideology which underlies the production of the text. An *oppositional* response to a cultural product is one in which the recipient of the text understands that the system that produced the text is one with which s/he is fundamentally at odds.[11]

A viewer of a film (reader of a text) comes to the moment of engagement with the work with a knowledge of the world and a knowledge of other texts, or media products.

"At the moment of textual encounter other discourses are always in play besides those of the particular text in focus..."[12]

What this means is that when a person comes to view a film, s/he does not leave her/his histories, whether social, cultural, economic, racial, or sexual at the door. The viewer also brings to the film knowledge, not only of other films, but also of films of this type. Viewers often have an oppositional stance in the act of viewing a film.

At the beginning, however, the viewer accepts a film for the way it is presented, and that presentation will initially elicit a preferred reading on the part of the viewer. The preferred reading is usually that of the dominant ideology, that of mainstream society which is governed by white, middle-class males. What this means is that a film will lead a viewer to see it in a certain way, because of the way the film is made. The film's producers are under both commercial and ideological constraints to structure an expensive media production in a manner that is familiar and therefore non-threatening to mainstream society. Consequently, this is the interpretation that the audience will initially make of the film, a mainstream interpretation. If the viewer accepts the film in the way that it is presented, this is the creative work's preferred reading.

If something strikes the viewer as amiss, subversion can occur. Subversion occurs in a filmic text when a moment arises that doesn't seem to fit. Behind the idea of

subversion lies the notion of "making strange." When things appear "strange" to the viewer, the viewer will then bring other viewpoints to bear on the watching of the film and will "see" things other than what the filmmakers intended. Then the viewer will read "against the grain" of the film.

BLACK RESPONSES TO TRADITIONAL DEPICTIONS

All of this is not to imply that producers of media products are aligned in a conspiracy against an audience. When a filmmaker constructs a work s/he will draw on her/his background, experience, and social and cultural milieu. A filmmaker will also draw on other films. To connect this back to the idea of a subversive reading of a mainstream text, when the filmmaker draws on her/his store of experience and other films, a viewer will also tap into her/his collective store of media experience. It is this, in part, that may lead a Black audience into an oppositional posture in the act of viewing. An example of this can be seen in the film *THE COLOR PURPLE*.

When *THE COLOR PURPLE* is compared unfavorably with *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* (1915) and *CABIN IN THE SKY* (1943), these are not accidental references. Steven Spielberg's *THE COLOR PURPLE* cross-references or refers back to both of these films as it does *HALLELUJAH!* (1929). In fact, according to Donald Bogle in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*, almost every Black "leading lady" in motion pictures, from Lena Horne in *CABIN IN THE SKY* to Lola Falana in *THE LIBERATION OF L.B. JONES*, owes a debt to the "gyrations and groans" of Nina Mae McKinney's character executing sensuous "bumps and grinds" in the famous cabaret scene in *HALLELUJAH!*[13] The corollary of this can be seen acted out by Margaret Avery as Shug in the juke-joint scenes in *THE COLOR PURPLE*.

There are also other aspects of Spielberg's *THE COLOR PURPLE* that recall the other two films. In the beginning of *THE COLOR PURPLE* the young Celie gives birth to a child fathered by the man she thinks is her father. She is aided in the birth by her sister Nettie. The scene is not so much graphically rendered as it is vivid. The viewer can recall the beads of sweat on Celie's face and the blood in the pan of water as Nellie wrings out the cloth she is using to wash Celie.

The next shot of blood is on the rock that one of Mister's bad kids throws and hits the young Celie with. We look at Celie and then there is a close-up of the blood on the rock. Further along in the film, and this is where Spielberg imitates D.W. Griffith in *THE BIRTH OF A NATION*, there is a scene of the grown Celie taking up a knife that she will use to shave Mister. It should be noted that this scene was not in the book and was entirely the film's invention. As Celie brings the knife closer to Mister's neck, there is a continual cross-cutting with scenes of the initiation rites of Adam (Celie's son) and Pasha in Africa. This cross-cutting is interspersed with shots of Shug dressed in a red dress running across a field to stop Celie from cutting Mister's throat. As the back and forth action of the three scenes is done, eventually the kids' cheeks are cut, and we see a trickle of blood running down one of their faces.

In fictional filmmaking, scripts utilize what is known as the rule of threes: first there is the introduction to a concept that is significant, then the set-up, then the pay-off. Without reaching too hard for significance, we can see in the meaning of

the shots of blood with the blood-red of Shug's dress as she runs to rescue Celie, and then the bloodletting of the African initiation rite, that these shots and their use of red culminate in the pay-off: these are "savage" people. This connects up later in the film with the overall red tone to the juke joint sequences and the red dress that Shug wears while she is performing there. As Barbara Christian put it, the gross inaccuracy of the African initiation ceremony coupled with the shots of Celie going after Mister with the sharpened knife seemed intended to depict a "primordial blood urge shared by dark peoples in Africa and Afro-Americans."

As Spielberg called on his store of media memories in making *THE COLOR PURPLE*, he used a cinematic technique that made Griffith famous, cross-cutting, toward the same end as Griffith that of portraying the savage nature of Black people. Another use of cross-cutting that seems to comment on the "inherent nature of Black people" derives from an earlier film, *CABIN IN THE SKY*. Here we see Shug overcome with remorse while she is singing in the juke-joint and then leading the "jointers" singing and prancing down the road to her father's church.

One Black reviewer of *THE COLOR PURPLE* wondered, in reference to this scene, if it were obligatory in every film that contained Black actors and actresses that they sing and dance. It appears that this is so, for if they did not, a mainstream audience (which is the one toward which commercial films are aimed) would still see them acting as such. Lorraine Hansberry, in an essay in which she analyzed her play *A Raisin in the Sun*, wrote about the collective store of associations that a mainstream audience brings to the viewing of works by Black people.

"My colleagues and I were reduced to mirth and tears by that gentleman writing his review of our play in a Connecticut paper who remarked of his pleasure at seeing how 'our dusky brethren' could 'come up with a song and hum their troubles away.' It did not disturb the writer in the least that there is no such implication in the entire three acts. He did not need it in the play; he had it in his head." [14]

THE MYTH OF THE EXOTIC PRIMITIVE

One of the critical questions that arises in connection with a subversive reading of a text is how a specific audience becomes motivated to read the work as they do. In a study of the plays, speeches and political writings of playwright Lorraine Hansberry, I found a consistent thread that runs through her writings. It appeared that the playwright was writing in response to a pervasive element in artworks from mainstream society which portrayed Black people.

I think this is relevant to this examination of Black females' response to the film *THE COLOR PURPLE* because it sheds light on the reasons why a particular audience would have an oppositional stance when viewing mainstream works. The negative assumptions that Hansberry was confronting and that she countered in her works I have identified as the *myth of the exotic primitive*. [15] I label it a myth not because of the concept's falseness but because of its wide acceptance, and because of the manner in which it functions as a cultural belief system.

In contemporary terms, a myth is a narrative that accompanies an historical sequence of events or actions. A body of political writings and literature develops around this narrative. This becomes the formulated myth. The myth is constructed

of images and symbols which have the force to activate a cultural belief system. This means that if a culture believes a myth to be true or operable in their society, a body of tradition, folklore, laws and social rules is developed around this mythology. In this way myths serve to organize, unify and clarify a culture's history in a manner that is satisfactory to a culture.

Mark Schorer, in *Myth and Mythmaking*, states that

"all convictions (belief system), whether personal or societal, involve mythology. The mythology, although historically grounded, does not have to be historically accurate. The truth or falsity of the myth is not important when considering the function of the myth (that of validating history), for the convictions or the cultural system of belief are not rational and are based on the controlling image and set of assumptions in the mythmaking process ... Belief organizes experience not because it is rational but because all belief depends on a controlling imagery and rational belief is the intellectual formalization of that imagery." [16]

In other words, we believe first, and then we create a rationale for our beliefs and subsequent actions. The formal expression of our beliefs can be seen in the imagery used by a culture."

The characteristics of the myth of the exotic primitive are these:

- Black people are naturally childlike. Thus they adjust easily to the most unsatisfactory social conditions, which they accept readily and even happily;
- Black people are over-sexed, carnal sensualists dominated by violent passions;
- Black people are savages taken from a culture relatively low on the scale of human civilization.

In one of her political writings, Hansberry outlined what she considered to be the genesis of the myth:

"The sixteenth-century spirit of mercantile expansionism that swept Europe, and gave rise to colonial conquest and the European slave trade, was also father of a modern concept of racism. The concept made it possible to render the African a 'commodity' in the minds of white men, and to alienate the conscience of the rising European humanism from identification with the victims of that conquest and slave trade. In order to accommodate programs of commerce and empire on a scale never before known in history, the Negro had to be placed arbitrarily outside the pale of recognizable humanity in the psychology of Europeans and, eventually, of white America. Neither his soul nor his body was to be allowed to evoke empathy. He was to be — and, indeed, became, in a created mentality of white men — some grotesque expression of the mirth of nature; a fancied static vestige of the primeval past; an eternal exotic who, unlike men, would not bleed when pricked nor revenge when wronged. Thus for three centuries in Europe and America alike, buffoonery or villainy was his only permissible role in the ball of entertainment or drama." [17]

As a panelist on "The Negro in American Culture" that aired on WABI-FM in New York in January 1961, Hansberry spoke eloquently about mainstream artists' need to portray Black people in a negative light. She said:

"And it seems to me that one of the things that has been done in the American mentality is to create this escape valve of the exotic Negro, wherein it is possible to exalt abandon on all levels, and to imagine that while I am dealing with the perplexities of the universe, look over there, coming down from the trees is a Negro who knows none of this, and wouldn't it be marvelous if I could be my naked, brutal, savage self again? This permeates our literature in every variation: I don't believe that Negro characters as created thus far have overcome that problem."
[18]

Knowing that this concept of exoticism underlies the products of mainstream cultural production, I think this is one of the reasons that most viewers of a film such as *THE COLOR PURPLE* have what Bogle described as a schizophrenic reaction. I think this is one of the reasons also that Michele Wallace appeared to contradict herself on the Donahue show. *THE COLOR PURPLE* did have something progressive and useful for a Black audience. At the same time some of the caricatures and representations made the viewer wince. It is my contention that a Black audience through a history of theatre-going and film-watching knows that at some point "some grotesque expression of the mirth of nature" is going to be presented to us. Since this is the case, we have several options available to us. One is to never indulge in media products. This would be impossible considering that we live in an age of a media blizzard. Another option, and I think this is more an unconscious reaction to and defense against racist depictions of Black people, we can filter out that which is negative and select from the media work that which we can relate to.

EXTRACTING OUR OWN READINGS

There is a concept developed by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* that explains how readers of a literary work can extract meaning from a creative work other than that which is anticipated or desired by the makers. I think this has a relationship to the manner in which Black females responded to *THE COLOR PURPLE* in that it posits a theory of how an audience makes meaning from a cultural product. To tie all of this together I think this is the way it works. An audience member from a marginalized group (people of color, women, the poor, etc.) has an oppositional stance as they participate in mainstream media.

This oppositional posture can lead to a subversive reading of a work. The motivation for this counter-reception is that we understand that mainstream media has never rendered our segment of the population faithfully. We have as evidence our years of watching films and television programs and reading plays and books. Out of habit, as readers of mainstream texts, we have learned to ferret out the beneficial and put up blinders against the rest. What Barthes does in *S/Z* is suggest how this is possible and he also examines how meaning is created in the mind of the reader.

Barthes' goal in *S/Z* is to make the reader of a text (probably a university student) a "producer" of the work rather than a passive consumer. He does this through an

examination of the process of the text's production. Barthes establishes various tools for evaluating texts, and he groups texts into the "readerly" and the "writerly." The readerly text is well-ordered, full of representations and presents itself as "natural" and "innocent." The readerly text is consumed by the reader. In the readerly text the reader more or less follows the breadcrumbs laid out by the producer of the work. As a readerly text presents itself as natural, or as a "window on the world," it seduces the reader into reading it in only a limited way.

The writerly text, on the other hand, is "ourselves writing," as Barthes puts it. The writerly text does not assume that there is a coherence to a text and that its meanings are immanent within the text. The writerly transforms not only the text but the reader as well. It challenges her/his assumptions about cultural products and about reality in everyday life. The writerly process trains the reader to see multiple meanings in a work rather than merely what the creative work attempts to present. Beyond this, Barthes trains readers in *S/Z* to have a more "writerly" response to texts that others would unthinkingly receive as closed. In other words, if we take Barthes one step further the same attitude that would allow a reader to grasp a writerly text can be seen as a "writerly attitude." And this attitude can be applied to more closed mainstream texts. This was Barthes' whole project in *S/Z*, as he taught his students how to "open up" the literary process of production of a mainstream "classical" work.[19]

A creative work constructed according to the encoding of dominant ideology will attempt to elicit only one true reading. This is a characteristic of a readerly text. Barthes contends in *S/Z* that there is a limited plural in readerly texts. This limited plural, as opposed to only one true meaning, has fissures that betray its innocence and transparency, according to Judith Mayne in "*S/Z* and Film Criticism." Mayne states,

"It is the reader's task to follow these 'cracks' opening them up even wider. Since ideology is borne most commonly by those conventions which are unnoticed, the kind of reading proposed by Barthes is a political act, an attack on dominant modes of perception." [20]

What this means in regards to *THE COLOR PURPLE* is that there are cinematic conventions at work in the construction of the film. A viewer is hypnotized by the lavish sets, the lush photography and the opulent musical score. The viewer is "manhandled" into a trance in the watching of *THE COLOR PURPLE* and is cinematically manipulated. For example, even though you know that when the sisters are reunited at the end of the film, they will play their children's hand-clapping game, and you are on guard against its emotional tug, it is difficult not to cry when the game begins. The film is an expertly crafted, emotional rollercoaster ride. But there are cracks; there are moments that don't quite fit.

Within the reunion sequence of Celie and Nettie and the hand-clapping, we see the return of Celie's children. Many viewers wondered why children who were raised by U.S. missionaries would come back unable to speak coherent English. This "crack" would also lead the viewer into questioning the African segments in their entirety. Although Africa was depicted in the book, the manner in which Africa entered the film was disturbing.

I think the characterizations of Harpo and Sofia would be another of the

questionable representations in the film that would force a "writerly" viewer into another reading. Barbara Christian found the most maligned figure in the film to be Harpo. She said that in the book he couldn't become the patriarch that society demanded that he become. Because the film cannot depict a man uncomfortable with the requirements of patriarchy, Harpo is made into a buffoon. Christian adds that "the movie makes a negative statement about men who show some measure of sensitivity to women."

The film used the characterizations of Harpo and Sofia as comic relief. Many Black viewers were upset with Harpo's ineptness in not being able to repair a roof. Supposedly that became even funnier if he fell three times. In her *Village Voice* review, Michele Wallace attributed other motives to the film's representations of Harpo and Sofia than as comic interludes. Wallace considered their appearances to be "white patriarchal interventions." She said:

"In the book Sofia is the epitome of a woman with masculine powers, the martyr to sexual injustice who eventually triumphs through the realignment of the community. In the movie she is an occasion for humor. She and Harpo are the reincarnation of Amos and Sapphire; they alternately fight and fuck their way to a house full of pickaninnies. Harpo is always falling through the roof he's chronically unable to repair. Sofia is always shoving a baby into his arms, swinging her large hips, and talking a mile a minute. Harpo, who is dying to marry Sofia in the book, seems bamboozled into marriage in the film. Sofia's only masculine power is her contentiousness. Encircled by the mayor, his wife and an angry white mob, she is knocked down and her dress flies up providing us with a timely reminder that she is just a woman"(25).

Sofia lying in the street with her dress up is almost an exact replica of a picture in a national publication of a large Black woman lying dead in her home after she has been killed by her husband in a domestic argument. This image plus some others in the film makes one wonder at Spielberg's unconscious store of associations.

Christian and Wallace's comments about the film are examples of the cracks that a writerly reading of *THE COLOR PURPLE* will open up. The political act that will be performed is that the viewer will become more aware of the process of the creation of a film and then will be able to discern when mainstream ideology is coming into play. Mainstream ideology in *THE COLOR PURPLE* attempted to portray Black people in the standard way, that of exotic savage creatures. Black female viewers "re-wrote" the work and were able to uncover something worthwhile and progressive from the film.

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The Color Purple. Brother from Another Planet The slavery motif in recent popular cinema

by Ed Guerrero

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After a prolific and profitable era spanning approximately 70 years, it seems that the overt inscription of the slavery motif and plantation genre has all but faded from the screens of U.S. popular narrative cinema.[1][[open notes in new window](#)] Because of the emergence of Black political consciousness, rising initially out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s, refining its expression in the Black rebellion of the 60s, and contributing to the United States' ever-growing perception of itself as a culturally plural, multi-ethnic society, it would be almost impossible, today, to capitalize and bring to the screen a culturally hegemonic, "Old South" epic on the scale of *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1939), or a film with the reactionary, plantation sentiment of Walt Disney's *SONG OF THE SOUTH* (1946).

Moreover, Hollywood's termination of "Blacksploitation" films as a profit making strategy in the late 70s, and the shift of studio capital into films with "crossover" themes aimed at broader, multiracial audiences have effectively put an end to films such as *SLAVES* (1969) and *MANDINGO* (1975), which took as their themes a reversed, or Afro-American, perspective on the slave system, by exposing its injustices and brutality.

This does not mean, however, that the depiction of slavery has entirely disappeared from U.S. screens. On the contrary, since slavery, and resistance to it, is a central and formative historical experience deeply rooted in the ideology of all Americans, its thematic interpretations are, generally, sedimented into contemporary film narratives and genres, and, specifically, into the symbolic or latent content of many films depicting Afro-Americans.[2]

These sedimentations can be as obviously and coherently expressed as the parody of the plantation genre in *THE TOY* (1982), starring Richard Pryor as a present day department store clerk bought by a rich, Southern politician, Jackie Gleason, as a "toy" for his son; or as in the *PLANET OF THE APES* quintet (1968-1973), where the struggles and reversals between futuristic apes and humans create a sustained allegory not only for slavery but also the Civil Rights Movement and the Black rebellion that followed it. Or, slavery's sedimentation can be as momentary as a fleeting musical allusion threaded into a film's soundtrack.

This occurs in the "post-nuke" science fiction DEF CON 4 (1985), when a bunch of Georgia "good ol boys" capture some of the scientific elite held universally responsible for nuclear disaster in the genre, tie their hands behind their backs, line them up single file with ropes around their necks and trot them down a highway. Filling in the scene's sedimented meaning is the sound of African marimbas as the technocrats are led off into captivity.

While considering the range of possible manifestations of this concept, I will focus on two recent films, *BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET* (1984) and *THE COLOR PURPLE* (1985), which are important not only for their sedimentations of the slavery motif, but also because they are popular commercial productions that attempt to articulate Black story lines acted by Black casts for consumption by a general mass media audience.

Since these films were made about Black people and not necessarily by them (Afro-Americans having little institutional control over "the mode of production" of their screen images) this article will locate these sedimentations in the broader context of popular cinema's culturally dominant ideology, which at minimum tends to fragment and individualize the Afro-American impulse for justice, and social equality, and usually, explicitly or implicitly, favors a privileged, white, male, perspective on the screen.

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET (1984), starring Joe Morton, produced and directed by John Sayles comes as a noteworthy, if rare, effort at making a film for commercial distribution that privileges elements of the Afro-American aesthetic, lifestyle, and historical/political perspective on the United States. Made as an allegory for the historical situation of the runaway slave, set in contemporary New York and produced in the loose framework of the Science Fiction genre, the film cannot be defined as the typical commodity turned out by Hollywood "studio system" which has been accurately described as "First Cinema."^[3] Rather, it fits into the style of film language labeled "Second Cinema" which has been accurately described as, New Wave and related film. It has a subjective, individualistic, "auteur" perspective; it often is less linear than First Cinema, more fragmented, disruptive, and thought-producing; it is more likely to expose social problems; it attracts liberal and progressive intellectuals; but it seldom addresses the politics of change.^[4]

BROTHER, then is an amalgam of displacements and sedimentations of slavery thematics figured into a unified allegory expressed in the "Second Cinema" style. And in a number of ways, *BROTHER* goes beyond merely reversing the older Hollywood hegemonic perspective on slavery as do the films of the "Blacksploitation" 70s, which tend to depict revolt, reversal and revenge in the relations between slave and master. *BROTHER* is timely and politically relevant because its sedimented slavery motif is set in contemporary New York, thus connecting the oppression of the antebellum past with the contemporary inner-city ghetto.

Because the film's narrative unfolds outside the South (slavery and the South being displaced to "another planet") the film focuses its attention on the trials and

adventures of a "runaway" in the North, and his resistance to slavery and slave catchers. Because few films articulate the perspective of the runaway slave facing an uncertain and problematic future in the North, *BROTHER* broadens the filmic mediation of slavery into significant new political dimensions and narrative terrain.

The film is about a "Brother" who escapes slavery on another, more technologically advanced, planet and takes refuge in Harlem with the active support of its Black, Latino and welfare white inhabitants. While the Brother (who cannot speak but has miraculous and psychic powers) goes through a series of adventures and interactions with various people in Harlem and the surrounding city, slave catchers, sent from his planet, track him, interrogate his friends and attempt to recapture him.

Here one finds an important refinement of the reversed perspective on slavery in the film's narrative, in that the film goes beyond merely exposing the evil nature of the slave system to show resistance to it in some detail, both on organized cultural and political levels. Brother's interplanetary flight, and the refuge he finds in New York, are analogous to the activities of the historical Underground Railroad, the abolitionist apparatus that helped tens of thousands of Afro-Americans escape across the Mason-Dixon Line to one of its most popular "stations," New York. Brother underscores this when he views an Afro-American historical exhibit celebrating the resistance and exploits of runaways and gestures to a young boy with him that he too, knows the plight of the runaway slave.

Audience identification with Brother is built by depicting the slave catchers as the faceless, sinister, Orwellian agents that we've all come to recognize and fear in our cinema. The ground is well prepared for the film's parody of such "thought police" by the "conspiracy" films of the 70s, *SERPICO* (1973), *THE PARALLAX VIEW* and *THE CONVERSATION* (both 1974), which reflect the nation's cumulative concern about extra-legal corporate or government activities.[5] Consequently, the Black men in Odell's bar, responding to the standard "have you seen this man" routine, instantly understand the slave catchers as a form of police authority, interplanetary or otherwise, and activate the Black cultural code of silent or evasive resistance in the face of such persons and institutions.

A white, woman clerk at a welfare office deploys a bureaucratic strategy, giving the slave catchers a stack of meaningless and confusing forms to fill out, thus avoiding their questions. The Puerto Riqueño who works with the Brother at a video arcade reads the slave catchers as *migra*, immigration agents, and dissembles using linguistic strategy, refusing to understand English. In all of these scenes the film's allegory works with complex multi-leveled, perfection, depicting the relentless pursuit of the slave catchers while at the same time portraying them with the impersonality of outer-space aliens and as authoritarian undercover agents. Here, the film is aesthetically and politically effective in translating the experience of the runaway slave into the terms and gestures of contemporary urban culture.

If the location of slavery is displaced onto another planet, it is also transfigured and existent here on earth, in contemporary New York City. The setting and visual terrain of the film make it clear that the Black inner-city which the Brother must negotiate, is as unfree, socially and racially stratified and dangerous as any plantation, if not more so. Brother is mugged and slashed by young junkies in a

tenement hallway. Or, de facto apartheid is shown with subtle irony in a scene where a white kid on the subway tells Brother that he can perform a magic trick and make all the white people disappear. The train then makes its last stop before heading uptown into Harlem; all of the whites get off and blacks headed home from work get on.

Brother makes a profound observation about the new and different forms slavery can take in this confusing urban world, which the film fittingly calls "Babylon." On his planet, the displaced Old South, slavery takes its traditional form of beings owned as commodities from whom labor is extracted. Whereas here in the ghetto, where Black labor has little value, as clearly shown by the idle, unemployed Black men in Ode's bar, slavery takes the form of consuming commodities: the ultimate commodity being heroin. Thus the film constructs a causal chain of exploitation shown in Brother's psychic detective work, tracking the line of profit from an o.d.'d junkie kid in an alley up through the street pushers to the top dealer, a white, corporate businessman directing the drug traffic from his plush office suite atop a skyscraper in Manhattan. Here the film's political argument is dialectically sharp, revealing drug addiction as a new insidious slavery and the corporate businessman as the new slavemaster.

However in other ways, the film's political argument is proscribed by the very commodity system that it seeks to unmask or critique. While Brother's muteness is an essential narrative device which allows several of the characters to play revealing soliloquies off of him, it also creates a "structuring absence" in the text which reveals ideological boundaries which the director and writers are unable to transcend.[6] In this sense, Brother's voice, and the possibility of him vocalizing claims for resistance, justice and freedom are eradicated, and he comes across as the silent, exotic "other," a common figure in the movie industry.[7]

Two examples of the sci-fi slave's silence come to mind. In *PLANET OF THE APES* (1968) the apes refuse to believe that humans they have captured can use language, the silence of the slave being one of their main rationalizations for keeping humans in slavery. In *ENEMY MINE* (1985), alien being Lou Gosset, yet another "brother from another planet" who has also experienced slavery, cannot speak to the audience because of the barrier of his exotic language.

Another important, latent meaning of the film's narrative mediates the contemporary concern about non-white immigration. The film opens with Brother's spaceship splashing down at Ellis Island, a key historical entry point of 19th and early 20th century immigrants coming to the U.S. seeking new lives and opportunities. So, Brother is simultaneously constructed as an alien from outer space, a runaway slave, and a West Indian immigrant. The latter of these identities is signified by the sound track of Caribbean steel drums, Reggae music, Brother's nascent dreadlocks and his journey through the hell of "Babylon" (New York at night) with his Jamaican "dub poet" guide "Virgil," an obvious allusion to Dante's *Inferno*.

However, the problem with his immigrant identity is that with it Brother takes on the neoconservative political emblem of "model minority." As the right-wing argument goes, "model minorities," immigrant Asians, West Indians, etc. have succeeded in the United States with personal initiative and self-discipline, whereas Afro-Americans, Indians and Chicanos lacking this "human capital" have not.[8]

Of course this argument conveniently overlooks the hundreds of years of organized genocide, exploitation, underdevelopment and racism that all people of color have had to endure.

But also, the film presents the audience with a complex, double message on Black solidarity. In the main, the film definitely speaks of Pan African unity and struggle against oppression, as signified in the name the protagonist is given "Brother," and the support of the blacks who so eagerly take him in. However, Brother is also different from the earthlings who shelter him. The eradication of his voice denies him the solidarity and identification of learning or communicating in the Afro-American or West Indian idiom. Brother's psychic powers and feet with three toes, as well as his talent for fixing electrical appliances are interesting expressions of the science fiction genre, but they also symbolize the "human capital" that allows him to succeed as a model minority.

He is able to use his psychic abilities to instantly find work and become the exception, the immigrant "model" among the unemployed Black men trapped in the streets and bars of Harlem. Moreover, these contrasts are heightened when the blacks at Odell's bar and Brother and other interplanetary runaways resist the slave catchers as separate, uncoordinated groups, and with different levels of effectiveness.

The film's closure builds when the slave catchers trap Brother at Odell's Bar, and the Black patrons are able to resist long enough to allow Brother to make his break. Later, he is apprehended but manages to escape down an alley with slave catchers in pursuit. Here Brother encounters the Underground of runaways, and they make a stand, surrounding the slave catchers. Shocked into immobility by the sight of dozens of ex-slaves gathered in collective resistance, the slave catchers pause in bewildered contemplation of their situation and then self-destruct by vaporizing themselves. This resolution clearly privileges the value of collective organization and resistance to oppression and has an allusive validity to the collective resistance of Afro-Americans, abolitionists and others to historical slavery.

Brother's merger into the Black community is ultimately signaled by his taking the A Train back up to Harlem and a shift in the soundtrack from steel drums, his musical marker throughout the film, to the Afro-American spiritual "Promised Land." However, this last scene seems to pose a set of ideological tensions and ironies as it reveals Brother, alone, smiling and looking through a chain link fence across an empty schoolyard at a drab, institutional building with a banner, "Harlem Plays The Best Ball In The Country," hung on its facade. This final shot frames Brother as an individual seemingly released from slavery and the social collectivity, free to pursue the vicissitudes of the American Dream.

Conversely, this final mise-en-scene also confronts and entraps him. The barrier of the chainlink fence and the dreary school building with its ironic message (Harlem has always played the "best ball" but it's quality education that determines a people's future) seems to signal Brother's absorption into a society where the opportunities and rights of the Afro-American are uncertain and ambiguous at best. Despite a thematic emphasis on the social collectivity throughout the film, Brother standing here alone, at the film's end, in a sort of spatial and social emptiness seems partially to recoup the Hollywood, studio system's narrative strategy of ultimately resolving social and political problems in individual terms.[9]

THE COLOR PURPLE

Unlike *BROTHER*, which is aesthetically and politically quite innovative in the trajectory of U.S. commercial cinema, *THE COLOR PURPLE* (1985) comes at the end of a long line of Hollywood studio productions based on all-Black casts and themes. And, in many ways *PURPLE*, predictably, shares a number of similarities and flaws with these films. While *BROTHER* sediments slavery into its narrative as a unified allegory, in *THE COLOR PURPLE* the slave motif surfaces intermittently as fragments that subtly invert historical meaning of slavery. And though the film avoids one of Hollywood's dominant codes, the female body as an object of voyeuristic, sexual pleasure, many of the Gettino/Solanas "First Cinema" criteria apply to *PURPLE*.

First Cinema productions are Hollywood or Hollywood derived films that offer the consumer/spectator a slick, glossy cinematic commodity that is expressed in the dominant language of popular, narrative film. Moreover, it depicts a world that is complete, where no social change is possible or necessary. And again, it always solves social or political problems with the actions and perspective of the individual.[10]

Moreover, *THE COLOR PURPLE* can be better understood when historicized as part of a long, line of such Hollywood, all-Black spectacles that locate their narratives in the rural, Black South in a romantic, ahistorical void that occurs somewhere between World Wars I and II. *COLOR PURPLE*'s resemblances to *HALLELUJAH* and *HEARTS IN DIXIE*, (both 1929), and *CABIN IN THE SKY* (1943) are instructive here. Consider that all of these films locate the Black community in naive or idyllic rural settings removed from the containment and oppression of the surrounding white community. Further, all of these spectacles construct Black folk as simple, country beings without the slightest inkling of a political consciousness or recognition of their painful historical situation. *PURPLE* does make some concessions on these latter points in that it tries, no matter how superficially, to acknowledge the social reality of racism in the confrontation between Sophia and the white Mayor and his wife.

All of these Black studio spectacles have entertaining, folksy, musical interludes built into their narratives. And, in the case of *CABIN IN THE SKY* and *THE COLOR PURPLE*, Black music is falsely polarized as "good" & "bad." In both films, Gospel or church music is inscribed as good, while the more powerful and universal Black idioms, Jazz and Blues, are evil. In a clever fantasy scene, in *CABIN IN THE SKY*, Louis Armstrong performs masterfully as a devil, playing Jazz in hell, while Duke Ellington's music is depicted as a sinful temptation set in a saloon, gambling house milieu as opposed to the virtuous, and nondescript, music sung in the church.

In *COLOR PURPLE* this same tired juke joint/church polarity is repeated, only this time with patriarchal affirmations which are particularly puzzling, since Walker's novel, above all, articulates and celebrates Black women's values. Shug Avery, who is a Blues singer, yearns throughout the film for a reconciliation with her preacher father. However, this comes about in a curious manner in a scene that is one of the film's climactic, ideological resolutions. Shug sings at Harpo's juke joint, a short distance from her father's church where the lead vocalist and the choir also sing to

their congregation. By cross-cutting between scenes of the two singers and their audiences, a musical, and ideological, contest builds between the secular world of the saloon and the realm of the church. As clever editing shapes an accelerating montage, Shug, leading the patron's of the Blues, starts walking towards the church. And, as they walk, their music subtly shifts to that of the church.

The final reconciliation between Shug and her preacher father, also between Blues and gospel audiences, occurs on unequal ground, in the church in front of the altar, with everyone singing spirituals and Shug throwing herself uncritically back into the arms of her father, the prime signifier of the institutional Christian patriarchy. Here, the ideological meaning and intent of Walker's book on the point of white, hegemonic, patriarchal religion is reversed. In the novel, Shug breaks with her father and the church because God, as interpreted by the church, is a "he" and a white man's God. Suffice it to say that this scene is unique to the film as Hollywood blatantly recoups the very values that Walker, through Shug, rejects.

Another way in which the dominant ideology is built into the film's musical, "apparatus" can be best explored by posing a critical question: If *THE COLOR PURPLE* is really about Black life and culture, and it depicts, no matter how ineptly, in its narrative content both Blues and Gospel music, why can't the film use Black music in its extradiegetic soundtrack?[11] While the musical content of the film is Blues and Gospel as heard in many scenes, the film's musical form, its musical soundtrack, is the same old generic, clichéd Eurocentric movie music functioning on a connotative level, jerking tears from the consumers, cueing them as to where to laugh, whom to hate or sympathize with, etc. This is all the more curious when one considers that renowned Black composer, Quincy Jones, is responsible for this music. In contrast to *PURPLE*'s tired soundtrack, note the articulation of the Black musical idiom in the soundtracks of Jones' *IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT* (1967), Taj Mahal's *SOUNDER* (1972), Muddy Waters' *MANDINGO* (1975). In fact, many critics have observed that the strongest component of many of the thematically Black films of the 60s and the heyday of "Blacksploitation" (1970-76), was the soundtracks composed by Afro-Americans in Afro-American musical idioms.[12] So in *PURPLE*, one ideology contains and dominates another, as director Spielberg contains and reverses the meanings of novelist Walker, and the Eurocentric soundtrack contains or packages Afro-American music for popular consumption.

Conjoined with *PURPLE*'s musical operations are fleeting images, and gestures that subtly shift the historical onus for the crime of slavery from the white planter class onto the Black male. One can discern in these sedimentations the unconscious recovery of some of the ideological terrain lost in commercial cinema with the disappearance of the plantation genre after the rise in Black political and media consciousness precipitated by the Civil Rights Movement. But also, Hollywood's strategy of inverting historical relations between the dominant society and people of color is traditional. For an example out of many, consider that one of the most common paradigms in the Western is that of peace-loving settlers surrounded on their land by intruding, bloodthirsty Indians, when in historical fact the situation was exactly the other way around.[13]

MISTER AS MASTER

In *THE COLOR PURPLE* there occur a number of images and moments that

implicate Mister as "Master" in his isolated little domain. First we see Mister's house, which has two facades to it. The one most commonly seen is that of a well-to-do farm house. The other, which flashes on the screen breaking through the surface narrative is the white, columned facade of the "Old South" mansion, the filmic, architectural icon of slavery, signifying that Mister's farm is also a plantation. Other visual fragments further reinforce this notion. Mister, wearing a planter's straw hat, sits on a horse in the field overseeing the work, a Black parody of the white planter managing his field hands. The visual contradiction in this scene surfaces when one considers that the universal beast of burden of blacks in the agrarian South and the animal that Afro-Americans have celebrated and identified with in their literature, poetry and music is the mule.

Added to these visual fragments are actions in the narrative that are further, latent expressions of the slavery motif. Celie's assumed father (another inferred slavemaster) rapes her and then separates her from and sells the resulting child, as happened many times under the domination of the white planter class in historical slavery. When Mister comes on his horse to Celie's father's door looking for a new wife, he and the father bargain for a moment and then Celie called out to display herself, like chattel on the auction block.

Moreover, in true plantation tradition, Mister sexually abuses, overworks and beats the Black women that live on his land. He also keeps Shug, his concubine in the same house as his wife and discourages his chattel from reading and writing. All of these things happened to Afro-Americans, as a people, under slavery. These were things done to Afro-Americans by the planter aristocracy and their agents. But in *THE COLOR PURPLE*, the meaning of slavery, sedimented into the text as latent fragments, is twisted, inverted. The planter class composed of white men and women is replaced by Black men. The burden of the slave master is displaced onto Mister and the implications of the film's sedimented subtext are that blacks, and Black men in particular, are somehow responsible for slavery.

These explorations of *PURPLE* resonate with the most obvious Afro-American criticism of the film which is that the film constructs a gender-divided reading of the oppression of Afro-Americans, with, even on its narrative surface, Black men as the predominant oppressors of Black women.[14] Black men are depicted as brutes, as mean, without any reference to the historical and social conditions that may have made some of them that way.

The film privileges sexism over racism, scapegoats Black men, and, unconsciously or not, fragments the Afro-American impulse for political, economic and human rights. This is not to say that folks didn't have many good reasons for liking the novel or that Afro-Americans don't have any gender problems. But one must ask the time-honored rhetorical question posed by Black film critics: Why is it that the only big budget, studio production of the year that mediates a Black theme and foregrounds Black women contains so many crude distortions and reifications of Afro-American culture and devalues Black men?

IDEOLOGICAL CONTAINMENT

But, there are other issues in the film that go beyond sedimented plantation thematics and seem to emphasize the kind of careless contempt with which Hollywood still handles the cultures and images of people of color. In once scene

Celie, is, justifiably, tempted to cut Mister's throat while shaving him. As she pauses with razor in hand, the scene cross-cuts back and forth between her, razor poised, and the ritual scarification of children taking place in Africa. By juxtaposing an initiation ceremony with Celie's murderous impulse, serious African religious/cultural practices are depicted as "savage" or "primitive" and African standards of beauty are ridiculed. This scene is purely a cinematic invention that occurs nowhere in the novel and expresses commercial cinema's dominant cultural values.

Another prime example of ideological containment in the film is the way that it packages Shug and Celie's lesbianism. Firstly, lesbianism, except for one timid scene, is repressed in the film, where it is significant in the narrative and to the meaning of the novel. But, when the issue is explored, commercial cinema's taboo against depicting homosexuality with any degree of acceptance or normality overrides the possibility of the audience understanding the scene's sexual importance.[15] Shug and Celie sit on a bed. They touch, kiss briefly, almost as sisters, all to the strains of Jones' canned soundtrack, and "that's all folks." Here, it is certainly true that one can read a text for its omissions and discern the director and film's ideological limitations as the commodity system demands the containment and control of all issues served up for popular consumption.[16]

Finally, we should discuss the film's closure, which contradicts the ending in Walker's novel. In the novel's conclusion, Mister sits on the porch, smokes, talks and helps Celie sew pants for her business. He is caring and humanized to a certain extent, and the scene suggests the possibility of reconciliation and healing within the Black family and community. But conversely, the film constructs a dissonant ending. It fragments Black unity by closing with Celie, Nettie, the children and the women of the family gathered in front of the house with a contrite and reflective Mister alone, out in the field. Again, the manipulations of the dominant cinema apparatus override the possibility of reconciliation and unity suggested in the closure of Walker's novel.

In conclusion, we must expect sedimented slavery thematics to continue in U.S. commercial cinema in all of their varied expressions. Whether slavery is constructed as a unified subtext in the form of allegory or parody, or is displaced into other historical periods or different genres, or surfaces in fleeting images of moments, it is too much a part of popular cinema for its codes and images to completely disappear from the screen. And, given the fact that U.S. cinema is conditioned by the commodity system itself, experiencing economic ups and downs, right and left cycles, we can expect intermittent attempts to recoup some of the cruder hegemonic manipulations and stereotypes depicted in the older films of the plantation genre. Of course these attempts will test the political awareness of all concerned, but judging from the critical response to *THE COLOR PURPLE*, these films will at least serve to advance the dialectical relationship between the movie audience and an industry that changes only when its audience forces it to.

NOTES

For helpful criticisms of this article I would like to thank Ron Takaki, Barbara Christian and Elaine Kim.

1. Ed Guerrero, "From BIRTH to MANDINGO: Hollywood's inscription of Slavery 1915 to 1975," *Ethnic Studies Occasional Papers Series*, 1:1 (S.F. State University,

Fall 1986). Here, I discuss the overt inscription of slavery as divided into three phases: 1. The hegemonic phase running from 1915 to WW II and exemplified by *BIRTH OF A NATION* (1915), 2. the revised phase running from WW II to the 60s and exemplified by *THE FOXES OF HARROW* (1947), and 3. the reversed phase running from the late 60s to the early 80s and exemplified by *MANDINGO* (1975). The present article continues this discussion.

2. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 211-12. Here I apply Jameson's concept to film, in that images, stereotypes, themes, metaphors are subject to a "vertical repression and layering and sedimentation" causing "the persistence of the older repressed content beneath the later formalized surface."

3. Fernando Solanas & Octavio Geuino, "Towards a Third Cinema," *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 44-64.

4. William Alexander, "Class, Film Language, and Popular Cinema," *Jump Cut*, No. 30 (March 1985), 45.

5. Seth Cagin & Philip Dray, *Hollywood Films of the Seventies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 92-253. Fredric Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *DOG DAY AFTERNOON* as a Political Film," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. II, Bill Nichols ed. p. 728. Here Jameson discusses the figuration of social authority in recent U.S. moviemaking as a "gazing face," reflecting a "cool and technocratic expertise" and a faceless impersonality that carries out the orders of a remote, or hidden power structure. In *BROTHER* the power structure is, in fact, on "another planet," and the impersonality of the "alien" slavecatchers, clad in sunglasses and futuristic jumpsuits, is a clear parody of contemporary cinematic agents of authority.

6. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 85-89. Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: BR Publishing, 1980), 13. Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," in *Critical Inquiry*, 12: 2 (Winter 1986), p. 321. Jameson adds to the discussion saying that:

"... narrative reduction has, for example, very real and practical consequences for ideology and ideological analysis. It is not enough to show a systematic abridgement in the generation and projection of narrative meanings, as though that were only a matter of aesthetic choice; we must try to understand that such eradications also have a political function."

7. Tom Engelhardt, "Ambush at Kamikaze Pass," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 3: 1 (Winter/Spring 1971), 6567.

8. Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 282-96. Thomas Massey, "The Wrong Way to Court Ethnics" *The Washington Monthly*, May, 1986. David Be

9. Judith Williamson, *Consuming Passions, The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Pub., 1987), 5. Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 57.

10. William Alexander, "Class, Film Language, and Popular Cinema," *Jump Cut*, No. 30 (March 1985), 45. Fernando Solanas & Octavio Gettino, "Towards a Third Cinema," *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 44-64. For discussions of the "invisible style" see Stephen Heath's article "Narrative Space" in *Screen*, 17: 3, (1976), 97, or Robert B. Ray's subchapter "The Formal Paradigm-The Invisible Style," in his *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1985), 32-55.

11. Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism and Representation," *Screen*, No. 2 (March/April 1983), 9. Many writers are now calling for a move beyond the "reductionism" of focusing the examination of cinematic racism on stereotyping alone. They discuss the need to look at other "mediations" and at how the "cinematic apparatus" as a whole structures racism into its operations.

12. Mary Ellison, "Blacks in American Film," in *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*, eds. Philip Daves and Brian Neve (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 87-89.

13. Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 23. Tom Engelhardt, "Ambush at Kamikaze Pass," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 1: 3 (Winter/Spring 1971), 65-67.

14. Les Payne, "NAACP Wins Best Flip-Flop in a Non-supporting Role," *Newsday* Sunday, March 30, 1986. Marlaine Glicksman, "Lee Way" (Spike Lee interview), *Film Comment* Vol. 22, #5, September-October 1986.

15. Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage, "The Politics of Sexual Representation," in *Jump Cut*, No. 30, (1985), 25 & 26. Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art* (New York: Random House, 1974), 235.

"In the commercial cinema, the portrayal of the homosexual has moved through well defined, if ridiculous, stages; his invisibility, his elimination, his transformation into something slightly less offensive (such as a Jew), his having to die a difficult death or commit suicide, and later, actual hints of his 'odious' activities and sniggering or circumscribed acceptance."

16. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 1.

"Ideology operates as a constraint, limiting us to certain places or positions within these processes of communication and exchange. Ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image a society gives of itself in order to perpetuate itself. These representations serve to constrain us (necessarily); they establish fixed places for us to occupy that work to guarantee coherent social actions over time. Ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have."

Re-vision: the limits of psychoanalysis

by Ellen Seiter

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Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism. Edited by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984). American Film Institute Monograph Series, Volume 3.

"As women, we have our work cut out for us." — Adrienne Rich

This volume of feminist film criticism contains four articles originally presented at the "Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices I" Conference (sponsored by the University of Southern California's Center for the Humanities and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Twentieth Century Studies in 1981). Other articles had originally appeared in journals (one each from JUMP CUT, *New German Critique* and *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*). The editors, Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams introduce the volume with an historical overview of feminist film criticism.

As the introduction indicates, the papers from the conference are strongly influenced by psychoanalytic and discourse theory (Michel Foucault figures prominently here) and aim to "provide a number of different entries and suggestions for breaking the hold of a monolithic construction of sexual difference." I shall begin by describing the four papers from "Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices."

Mary Ann Doane's essay, "The 'Woman's Film': Possession and Address," deals with a group of films (DARK VICTORY, 1939; NOW VOYAGER, 1942; SUSPICION, REBECCA, and GASLIGHT, 1944; POSSESSED and THE TWO MRS. CARROLLS, 1947, among many others) in terms of sharing an address to the female spectator rather than sharing the features of a single genre. Doane is interested in female subjectivity and three types of "obsessions" she finds in these films. Those "obsessions" include the films' setting in the domestic sphere and that sphere's association with the uncanny; the medical discourse in the films, which is engaged in the control of the female body; and feminine masochistic fantasies, their relationship to sexuality (one of replacement), and the problematic of this address to the female spectator. This essay appears in Doane's *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Indiana U. Press, 1987). The connection between the ideas in this essay and the historical place of women in the family in the 1940s

should make an important contribution to feminist film criticism.

"When the Woman Looks" by Linda Williams offers an analysis of the horror film which makes use of Mary Ann Doane's idea that "the woman's exercise of an active investigating gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimization." Using examples from the silent period, Williams describes what it has meant in the cinema for women to be blind, to refuse to look, or, most importantly, to dare to return the male gaze. Williams pays close attention to many classic horror films (in particular, *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*, Rupert Julian, 1925) where the film permits the woman to look and she sees a monster, a distortion of her own image.

Williams interprets this not as the recognition of castration, as Laura Mulvey's and Stephen Heath's psychoanalytic models would suggest, but as "a potentially subversive recognition of the power and the potency of a non-phallic sexuality." Williams then extends this analysis to *PEEPING TOM* (1960) and *DRESSED TO KILL* (1980). These films contain the disappearance of the monster and his replacement by a normal-looking man, who (in the latter two films) appears as a woman when enacting violence against women. In this later development, the woman becomes "both victim and monster." Williams' overview of the horror genre, though cursory, situates cinema's increasingly violent misogyny in film history. She traces the way that female desire, once permitted in the woman's look in horror films, now becomes nothing but monstrous and victimizing in film.

Our attention turns from the woman's gaze to the woman's voice in Kaja Silverman's "Disembodying the Female Voice." Her formal analysis of the sound/image relation in terms of gender concentrates on the conspicuous absence of a female voice-over in classical cinema. This absence symptomizes the exclusion of the female subject from the production of discourse. Silverman's essay has implications for the practice of feminist filmmaking, and it invites the re-analysis of Hollywood films with attention to the construction of the soundtrack and to the way the films obsessively refer the female voice to the female body. Silverman discusses the use of the "disembodied" female voice-over in a number of films directed by women, finding Yvonne Rainer's *JOURNEYS FROM BERLIN* (1971) a powerful example of this formal strategy.

The final essay in the volume, Teresa de Lauretis' "Now and Nowhere: Roeg's *BAD TIMING*" is the most indebted to discourse theory. In its choice of topic, it seems the most puzzling essay to find in a book on feminist film criticism. Nicholas Roeg's film *BAD TIMING* concerns the police investigation of a psychoanalyst who is suspected of attempting to murder and then raping his lover.

De Lauretis' choice of this particular film seems to be a kind of worst-case exercise in proving Foucault's assertion that "the points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network." She also admires the director as auteur a great deal. I cannot summarize De Lauretis' complex argument here, but I would suggest her analysis is seriously limited by concentrating on a film such as *BAD TIMING*, which does not offer most women what it has offered de Lauretis.

These four essays contribute many original and stimulating ideas to feminist film criticism. The emphasis on theoretical perspectives derived from psychoanalysis, however, seriously limits their appeal to a wider feminist readership. Many feminist filmmakers and critics will certainly be troubled by the dearth of

references to feminist theorists working outside of film or semiotics, and will be alienated by the frequency with which the names of the fathers appear here. Only Linda Williams' piece has the kind of skepticism about psychoanalysis that most feminists demand. When Mary Ann Doane cites Freud's case study on masochism, "A Child Is Being Beaten," she comes dangerously close to offering Freud's reports on women patients as empirical evidence of the structures of the feminine unconscious.

The influence of psychoanalysis can also be seen in the choice of films to write about. Women's films and horror films contain a lot of vulgar Freudianism, which makes psychoanalytic approaches particularly inviting. Kaja Silverman discusses this work of many women filmmakers, such as Yvonne Rainer, whose films deal on an overt narrative level with psychoanalytic principles. Silverman excludes other filmmakers whose work has broader social implications, such as Michelle Citron. De Lauretis chooses a film that is literally about a psychoanalyst. Altogether they emphasize English-language and avant-garde cinema to the exclusion of other kinds of film and fail to consider class and

Finally, the theoretical perspectives employed in these four essays have reproduced the heterosexism of their model, psychoanalysis. Lesbianism is scarcely mentioned in any essay except B. Ruby Rich's "From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation: MAEDCHEN IN UNIFORM (reprinted from JUMP CUT, No. 24-25. March, 1981). Lesbian filmmakers, writers and journals are consistently excluded from the historical overview in the introduction. Thus lesbianism is marginalized to one essay in the volume and one film in history (as something of the exotic past, Weimar Germany). In a book that purports to see "difference differently, revising the old apprehension of sexual difference and making it possible to multiply differences," this is inexcusable.

B. Ruby Rich's article, along with Judith Mayne's "The Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism" and Christine Gledhill's "Recent Developments in Feminist Film Criticism," are the broadest in scope and the most accessible articles in the book. While teaching feminist film courses at the University of Oregon for the past several years, I have found Rich's essay on MAEDCHEN IN UNIFORM to have a profound impact on students, opening up a wide range of critical issues and stimulating discussion throughout the course. The integration of textual analysis of the film with its production history and a sophisticated analysis of the film's social, cultural and political context make Rich's essay an exemplary piece of feminist film criticism.

In "The Woman at the Keyhole," Judith Mayne relates feminist literary criticism to issues addressed in films made by and for women. Mayne discusses the relation between the film and the novel, and she examines both as meditations on the split between the public and the private spheres, arguing that we should consider voyeurism in this context. Mayne's overview includes women as writers of fiction, as critics, and as filmmakers. She places some of the critical questions raised by feminist film criticism in an historical perspective. Mayne defines feminism as "the attempt to theorize female experience into modes of resistance and action."

Christine Gledhill reflects this concern in her extremely useful theoretical summary and analysis, the first essay in the volume. Gledhill traces the ideas of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan as they have been used by feminist

film critics, especially Pam Cook, Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey. This essay offers both a lucid explication of the theories involved and a careful analysis of the way these theories have directed feminist film criticism away from understanding women in social practices other than cinema by "conflating the social structure of reality with its signification." These theories have also pulled feminist film criticism away from considering the "intersection of gender with class and racial differences among others" because they have adopted Lacan's theory of the subject with its attention to the constitutive force of language.

Gledhill describes the entrapment that has resulted from these theoretical applications in this way:

"The unspoken remains unknown, and the speakable reproduces what we know — patriarchal reality."

She calls for feminist critics to pay attention to what they have left out as they have emphasized the power of narrative structure, to pay attention to "the material conditions in which it functions for an audience." We must not privilege film discourse to the exclusion of all other discourses and practices, according to Gledhill, and we must attend to the interactions and contradictions among these.

The act of re-vision will involve an ongoing evaluation of the consequences of employing psychoanalysis, semiotics and structuralism as dominant theoretical paradigms. We will need to integrate a much broader spectrum of feminist thought in our work. We will need to listen to women of color, lesbians and working class women. And as teachers and critics we must keep in mind Adrienne Rich's words:

"Our struggles can have meaning and our privileges — however precarious under patriarchy — can be justified only if they can help to change the lives of women whose gifts — and whose very being — continue to be thwarted and silenced."[1]

NOTES

1. Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 38.

New German Cinema: The displaced image

by Jan Mouton

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New German Film: The Displaced Image by Timothy Corrigan (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1983), 213 pp. HB \$19.95/PB \$8.95

West German Film in the Course of Time by Eric Rentschler (Bedford Hills, NY: Redgrave Pub. Co., 1984), 260 pp. PB \$14.95

The signing of the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1962 marked the beginning of a new era in West German film. However it was not until Völker Schlöndorff's *YOUNG TORLESS* and Alexander Kluge's *YESTERDAY'S GIRL* were screened at the New York Film Festival in the fall of 1967 that moviegoers on this side of the Atlantic began to see examples of New German Cinema. In the ensuing years a great deal of interest at film festivals, art houses, and campus film societies has been directed toward New German Cinema; and a few directors from the German Federal Republic have managed to break into the commercial distribution circuit here as well.

During the course of the past year, two excellent histories of New German Cinema have appeared, providing U.S. viewers with extremely perceptive textual analyses (Corrigan's *New German Film*) as well as invaluable discussions of contextual material (Rentschler's *West German Film*). Furthermore, both Corrigan and Rentschler are, in effect, introducing their American readers to the theoretical system of Hans Robert Jauss as this applies to film history.

RECEPTION THEORIES OF H.R. JAUSS

In Germany Jauss's work, especially his "aesthetics of reception," is generally considered the most significant contribution to the field of literary theory in the last twenty years, and a collection of his works in translation recently appeared in the University of Minnesota's "Theory and History of Literature Series."^[1][\[open notes in new window\]](#) Corrigan and Rentschler have taken important first steps in applying Jaussian theories to the study of film.

Jauss deals with literature's relation to history. His system attempts to overcome the old Marxist/Formalist dichotomy by "satisfying the Marxist demand for historical mediations while retaining the Formalist advances in the realm of

aesthetic perception." [2] Jauss situates literature within a larger process of events and focuses attention on the perceiving subject.

In his aesthetics of reception, Jauss uses as a "methodological centerpiece" a notion of the horizon of expectations, a mediating device which enables the reader/viewer to participate in a process-like relationship with any given literary/cinematic work and with its author. With film the horizon of expectations resides in a viewer's head, so to speak, and is formed by all the films he or she has seen (the diachronic or historical aspect) and by his or her socio-historical surroundings (the synchronic or simultaneous aspect). Any viewer, of course, goes through a process of continuously establishing and altering horizons as he or she continues to view media and to experience life. Filmmakers, too, participate in this same diachronic/synchronic process, and engage in multidimensional dialogues — with film history, with their socio-historical surroundings, and with the audience. According to Jauss:

"The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a dialogical and at once process-like relationship between work, audience, and new work that can be conceived in the relations between message and receiver as well as between question and answer, problem and solution. The closed circle of production and of representation within which the methodology of literary studies has mainly moved in the past must therefore be opened to an aesthetics of reception and influence." [3]

In his brief introduction, Timothy Corrigan tells how he restricted the scope of his study. He considers films made between the 1962 issuance of the Oberhausen Manifesto and the 1977 filming of *GERMANY IN AUTUMN*. (In fact, all the films he analyzes were made within an even narrower time period, the five years between 1972 and 1977.) In terms of aesthetics, the films all demonstrate the director's ability to manipulate, challenge, and dislocate established codes. This means that each of the films "manifests in the work of its text the historical conflict and exchange which describes its defining context," and each "addresses the problem of opening alternative avenues of communication while still operating within the usually closed communication system established by ... Hollywood" (p. xii).

Corrigan's first chapter, "A History, A Cinema: Hollywood, Audience Codes, and the New German Cinema," describes his critical methodology, and the second chapter, "Wenders' *KINGS OF THE ROAD*: The Voyage from Desire to Language," skillfully applies this theoretical apparatus to a specific film. Subsequent chapters refuse to fit so neatly into the schema, and this makes for a less-than-unified book, but does not necessarily diminish the value of any given chapter.

Due to a combination of factors growing out of United States' policies toward West Germany after World War II — including economic regulation and political censorship — the postwar generation of German movie-goers grew up on a steady program of Hollywood products (many coming from the huge backlog of films which had been banned during the Nazi period). Since film distribution lay in the hands of the Allied Powers and since the under-financed and decentralized domestic industry produced works altogether inferior to the Hollywood imports, for many years little in the way of German film was being exhibited in Germany.

When a new generation of directors began to emerge in the 1960s, their works were inevitably created in response to the dominant Hollywood model. Informed by Jaussian theory, Corrigan shows how the filmmakers attempted to create a new cinematic discourse — a discourse directly challenging traditional filmic language and reflecting their own social reality and historical past. The New German Cinema directors made films with open texts which called for active viewers. These viewers, from their own horizons of expectations, were expected to confront the films in a participatory, dialogic manner. Although Corrigan consciously privileges the filmic text as the center of the exchange between audience and screen, he uses the term "text" in the inclusive sense of "an intertextual surface infiltrated by specific extra-filmic dimensions — historical, ideological, and psychological" (p. 17).

In his discussion of Wender's *KINGS OF THE ROAD*, Corrigan proceeds from Metz' theory of cinematic signification and coding. He expands Metz's position to include Jaussian notions of the dialogical and process-like relations between the work and its antecedents, on the one hand, and the work and its audience, on the other. The film has a much-quoted line,

"The Yankees have even colonized our unconscious."

This line foregrounds the confrontation between the ubiquitous U.S. cultural presence in Germany and the Germans' attempts to come to terms with this presence both in their films and in their lives. In Corrigan's excellent analysis of the film as two intertextual voyages — one narrative, one cinematic — he shows how Wenders' variations on the traditional cinematic voyage, the U.S. road movie, bring the spectator, as well as the two characters, to a radical awareness of a context or field of action outside the route of the voyage. The short-circuiting results in the realization that the voyager is not just a participant in the voyage but a watcher outside and independent of the journey itself. In the film, this realization entails dissatisfaction, isolation, and finally the possibility of action for the audience ... the possibility of a new relationship between the spectator and the screen (pp. 36-7).

Corrigan follows the chapter on Wenders with a brilliant analysis of Fassbinder's *THE BITTER TEARS OF PETEA VON KANT*. He begins by locating the film in Jaussian terms: its exaggerated isolation is

"a function of a complex horizon of historical expectations which have their center in the Hollywood subject but which also include a number of social formulations of a specifically German kind" (p. 47).

As the argument of the chapter develops, however, it seems increasingly informed by the theories of Metz and Jacques Lacan, and in its final section, by feminist film theory.

What Corrigan shows is that Fassbinder has created a film about desire (which includes nostalgia, theatrics, dreams, images, oppressors, victims). Yet the dynamics of Fassbinder's treatment of space (especially planar interactions among the three major surfaces in the film) enable him to demystify the conventional mechanics of representation and subvert the passive structure which the emotional force of the film experience imposes on the spectator (p. 67). Fassbinder thereby reveals the connections between patterns of exploitation in a patriarchal society and the tyranny of the film image in conventional cinema.

The next two chapters, one on Völker Schlöndorff's COUP DE GRACE, the other on Alexander Kluge STRONGMAN FERDINAND, are competent but less interesting than the Wenders and Fassbinder chapters. I find the films themselves are less interesting. It would seem that THE LOST HONOR OF KATHARINA BLUM might have served as a more fruitful subject for a Schlöndorff study, or Kluge's THE PATRIOT would have fit well within the theoretical framework of Corrigan's study, although it appeared after GERMANY IN AUTUMN, placing it outside his time limits.

The next chapter on Werner Herzog's THE MYSTERY OF KASPAR HAUSER is excellent. Corrigan sees Herzog as trying to make "radical seers" Out of his commercial audiences — audiences that have been wrongly conditioned to see things a certain way. Rejecting Hollywood's prefabricated entertainments, Herzog reaches back to film's historical origins (Griffith or Murnau) for inspiration. The pristine, naive qualities of early film hold a special fascination for Herzog who often imbues his own characters and films with something of the same.

Corrigan points to an especially interesting connection between the "wild child" character, Kaspar Hauser, who must learn a language which challenges his own perceptions (though if the child were to fail to do so he would be forever unable to communicate those perceptions), and Herzog himself, who stands in a similar position vis-à-vis traditional cinematic language. Among the other linguistic connections Corrigan deals with, the most fascinating is between Kaspar's name, planted and growing in watercress (a "verbal and visual sign of the individual's bond with the energies of the world — a bond that is, however, always ephemeral when subjected to those energies" [p. 133]) and Herzog's own communicative goals.

"The blooming of Kaspar's name ... becomes the verbal sign and symbol of the imaginative penetration into the world that Herzog aspires to himself with the language of his cinema, as it works to see the world with infant eyes. Like Kaspar's name, this vision and its language are singularly unconventional, holistic, and resistant to narrative patterning, and more than the language of any other commercial German director, it remains a struggle toward an effacement of a homocentric perspective" (p. 133).

In the remainder of the chapter, Corrigan discusses the nature of this cinematic language of Herzog's as "a logic of space, spectacle, and linear development."

The next chapter, on Hans-Jurgen Syberberg's HITLER, A FILM FROM GERMANY, begins with a characteristically aggressive quotation from the filmmaker, claiming that his films are:

"a declaration of war against the present forms of cinema dialogue and of boulevard-type cinema in the tradition of Hollywood and its satellites ... A declaration of war against psychological chitchat, against the action film, against a particular philosophy endlessly linking shots and reverse shots, against the metaphysics of the automobile and the gun, against the excitement of opened and closed doors, against the melodrama of crime and sex." (p. 147)[4]

Given the rigorously oppositional stance Syberberg takes in his position and practice, one might question the decision to include him in this book, especially when Jean Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet were excluded as "militantly singular directors," others because they were not "significant presences on the American film circuits." The book concludes with a short chapter entitled "Other Courses in Time." It deals briefly with Werner Schroeter, a filmmaker who Corrigan says has cared more for the honesty of his conceptions than for the avenues of distribution, and whose work consequently has had little impact on critics and audiences.

The real "absent presence" in the book, however, are women filmmakers. Films by three of the most important West German women directors were released between 1972 and 1977: Helma Sanders-Brahms's *THE BEACH UNDER THE SIDEWALK*, Helke Sanders's *THE ALL ROUND REDUCED PERSONALITY*, and Margarethe von Trotta's *THE SECOND AWAKENING OF CHRISTA KLAGES*. These films, as well as others by Jutta Brückner or Ula Stöckl for example, offer extremely interesting instances of an alternate film discourse that would lend themselves especially well to a Jaussian analysis. Corrigan perpetuates the unfortunate pattern of phallocentrism among New German Film critics. Particularly for U.S. readers, located as we are within the Hollywood culture of the Father, the "otherness" of a film culture within which feminist filmmaking plays an important role would have great interest.

Whereas Corrigan's book is divided into chapters on individual films, Rentschler organizes his around certain social and aesthetic structures. He, too, systematically passes over the work of women filmmakers. While Corrigan completely ignores the topic, Rentschler on several occasions refers to feminist filmmakers. He even accuses other critics of overlooking them (p. 161) and goes so far as to point to the problem of their being "ghettoized and ignored by the mainstream of German film culture" (p. 164), but he never discusses their work. From among Rentschler's chapters, whose titles are very clever appropriations of New German Film titles ("History Lessons," "American Friends and the New German Cinema Patterns of Reception," "Calamity Prevails Over the Country," "The Subjective Factor in the Course of Time"), one title is conspicuous by its absence. It should have been called "The All Round Marginalized and Ignored Personalities: Feminist Filmmakers in the Federal Republic."

Although the two books by Corrigan and Rentschler share this lack — and it is a serious one — in many other ways the books are different and complementary. Rentschler, too, bases his study on the theories of Hans Robert Jauss. However, in contrast to Corrigan's detailed analysis of works by a few "major" directors (or to the introductory surveys by Sanford and Franklin who deal with essentially the same chosen few),^[5] Rentschler sets out to write a "counterhistory" which presents alternative images and which, he says, has been shaped by a decided bias in favor of the "rougher edges" of West German filmmaking (p. iii).

Rentschler makes a strong case for the appropriateness of following a Jaussian model for a history of New German Cinema when he writes that

"the impetus at hand in a good number of Young German films and the insight central to reception theory is a common one: history is a process engaging the subject in a dynamic relationship" (p. 8).

Jauss's program also parallels Young German Film's rebellion against *Papas Kino* (Grandpa's cinema) in that it grew out of a period of opposition to previous socio-cultural models during which challenging the whole conservative intellectual heritage became a political issue. In fact, 1967, the year when New German Cinema made its appearance at the New York Film Festival, is also the year when Jauss delivered his famous lecture, "What is and for what purpose does one study literary history?" That lecture announced the end of the old regime and called for revolution in the field of literary scholarship.

Rentschler begins his "counter-history" by specifying the ways in which he will use Jauss's theories "to combine both social and aesthetic structures with their historical dimensions in a discussion of West German film since 1962" (p. 16). This project includes:

Outlining the expectations behind the Oberhausen Manifesto and the subsequent development of Young German Film.

1. Viewing West German films within a historical continuity beyond simply film-based considerations.
2. Discussing West German directors' relation to tradition in their attempt to fashion a viable alternative national cinema.
3. Describing the precarious situation faced by West German filmmakers within a complex of public institutions and showing how socioeconomics have conditioned the making of images in the German Federal Republic.
4. Explaining the key role of international criticism and reception in fashioning public images of West German films—and the consequences of this.

Following the outline, Rentschler devotes the next section of his book to what he calls "West German Film's Precarious Course in Time: *Misère-en-scène* in the Federal Republic," a chronological sketch of the postwar film situation in the FRG, beginning with a debunking of both the "we had to begin from zero" notion as well as an "enfant terrible" explanation for the existence of New German Cinema. The sketch continues with a characterization of the socio-cultural context of the fifties: the functioning of the Group 47, the collapse of *Papas Kino*, the growing influence of the ideas of the Frankfurt School, and the *Wirtschaftswunder* (postwar economic miracle). Within this context, Rentschler describes the struggles of the new generation of filmmakers.

Rentschler is extremely knowledgeable about the significant structures in Germany during these decades, and he points to ways in which they affected filmmaking and film viewing. The first landmark of the 1960s was Oberhausen, followed by the founding of the *Institut für Filmgestaltung* (Institute for Film Design) in Ulm, and subsequently, the film academies in Berlin and Munich. During the Sixties, too, the *Kuratorium junger deutscher Film* (Board of Curators of the Young German Film) was established as a film subsidy granting body, and the *Filmförderungsgesetz* (Film Subsidy Law) was passed. It was in this decade as well that such films as *YESTERDAY'S GIRL* and *YOUNG TÖRLESS* began to appear.

With the 1970s came the fragmentation and ultimate collapse of the student movement, the organization of the *Filmverlag der Autoren* (an independent filmmakers' group concerned with both production and distribution), the appearance of the first works of Fassbinder, Herzog, and Wenders, international

attention for the New German Cinema at festivals and in art houses, the making of *GERMANY IN AUTUMN*, and in 1979, the signing by sixty filmmakers of the "Hamburg Declaration."

Having thus given the reader a basis for understanding the context out of which German film culture arose over the past decades, Rentschler continues by focusing on particular aspects of the filmmakers' practice and on the reception of their films. In the next chapter he argues that what began in Germany "as a counter-cinema dedicated to alternative modes of representation, to views of the present not found in the established media" (p. 65), was transformed in the U.S. into a commodity. It became an "in" item at film festivals and art houses and tended to be understood as the personal expression of a few eccentric genius-directors. He blames this reception in part on U.S. journalists, film critics, and scholars still held in thrall by a narrow auteurism, and in part on the vagaries of the distribution system.

"In the U.S. critics end up in the position of 1) stressing the finished product and disregarding the process, 2) concentrating on the formal attributes of films without taking into account the socio-historical setting they reflect or issue from, and 3) enshrining a few privileged directors in the auteurist pantheon, thus fostering an extremely narrow view of West German Cinema as a whole as well as an often inaccurate image of the canonized luminaries" (p. 83).

The enthusiasms, distortions, and gaps in U.S. reception patterns stand in interesting contrast to the reception of these films in their own country, where they tended to be ignored or were reviewed solely on the basis of their ideological assumptions and socio-political messages. Few German critics showed an interest in cinematic form or visual/aural style. New German Cinema directors continued to make films in part as a response to their reception. To restate the Jaussian point, "the manner in which a nation's films are received can have a lot to do with the formation of present images — and the making of future ones" (p. 92).

In his next chapter Rentschler turns his attention to the odd topic of the *Heimatfilm* (roughly, the Homeland film), a uniquely German genre, in some ways parallel to the U.S. Western — but with an important difference. Outside the *Heimat* relatively few are interested in *Heimatfilme*. Even with Rentschler's insights on the new *Anti-Heimatfilm* as a type of sub-genre, this chapter remains something of a curiosity in a reception history of West German film written for U.S. readers.

The *Heimatfilm* discussion is followed by one of much greater interest, given its far-reaching political implications. This is the so-called *Literaturverfilmungskrise* (literary adaptation crisis) of 1977. Although Germans seem to have forgotten about this phenomenon rather quickly and U.S. viewers never saw it in the first place, what is important to realize — and Rentschler makes this very clear — is that the structures which caused the problem are still intact today. At the heart of the matter lie questions of politics and economics. Who decides which films are to be financed? And how is this decided? During 1977 when filmmakers faced an escalating intolerance toward dissident points of view, only "safe," i.e. non-controversial and easily legitimated, films became funded. "Safe" films were looked upon favorably — ones that promised box-office success. And it was the safe films, too, which were chosen to represent Germany at festivals and which were awarded

the government prizes. Jan Dawson sums up the dilemma:

"The life, shape and future of that elusive dream, 'the alternative cinema,' lie in the hands of a non alternative Establishment, and even radical self-expression needs conservative endorsement and commercially produced technology" (p. 151).[6]

Rentschler finishes this appropriately unsettling chapter with a discussion of Schlöndorff/Böll's "Antigone" sequence from *GERMANY IN AUTUMN*, and concludes by saying,

"The *Literaturverfilmungskrise* demonstrates how successfully government-sponsored institutions can stifle creative and critical filmmaking..." (p. 153)

Finally, Rentschler discusses subjectivity and is careful to locate it in its proper socio-historical context rather than let it float as a kind of idiosyncratic auteurism or as the expression of self. He approaches this theme of the problematic and problematized subject from a perspective developed by Michael Rutschky in his book, *Erfahrungshunger: Ein Essay über die siebziger Jahre, (Hunger for Experience: An Essay on the 1970s)*. He sees the films he discusses as communicating "a profound social experience, a more encompassing historical contest" (p. 166), despite their extreme privileging of the inner self.

Here, Rentschler's political reading of Peter Handke's *THE LEFT-HANDED WOMAN* is extremely interesting. Contrary to the way in which this film is usually understood, he shows how

"there lies a more subversive potential, indeed a crucial historical experience behind this defiantly under-narrated, elusive, and impenetrable film" (p. 167).

He applies insights drawn from works by Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin as well as Rutschky to gain access to its social and political content. Rentschler can then read *THE LEFT-HANDED WOMAN* as a dramatization of a contemporary paradox: the individual's

"desire to remain undefined by social mechanisms and organizational frameworks ... in a society which on the one hand promotes a public ideology of individual fulfillment and yet on the other hand increasingly creates conditions that stifle real self-actualization" (p. 171).

THE LEFT-HANDED WOMAN is thus seen as opening itself up to a larger historical discussion and as providing a critique of modernity.

"The film in this sense portrays a private rebellion at whose center lies a defiant attempt to assert one's own gaze, to pose personal discourse in the face of more uniform modes of experience" (p. 173).

West German Film in the Course of Time provides the reader with two very useful appendices: a year-by-year listing of West German films made since 1962, and a bibliography of readings in English on New German Cinema. Unfortunately the book has no general index (it has an index of films, English titles only) nor

glossary. One further comment must be made about this book, and that in regard to Rentschler's English. In addition to many non-standard usages ("the country's believed-for-dead cinema," or "directors ceased fears that..."), there are outright errors ("a tact often pursued" or "suffice to say that..."). Worst of all, Rentschler uses the word "one" to excess, which is not just tiresome and awkward, but ultimately confusing. Who, for example is this "one" in the following passage — the subject of the previous sentence? the author? the reader? people in general? Reader beware.

"The time machine is all askew for American critics who perforce speak of Fassbinder in the perpetual present with no clear sense of his stylistic evolution. One considers West German cinema as a whole even though one only has access to a few bits and pieces..." (p. 72).

As a final remark I must describe the patriotic/patriarchal look of these two books: one in tones of *schwarzrotgold* (the black, red, and gold of the German flag), each with double male images (Ganz/Hopper and Vogler/Zischler respectively) and, of course, the male names of their authors. Nevertheless the books' virtues vastly outweigh their weaknesses; they complement each other very well and are essential reading on New German Cinema. Perhaps even their phallocentrism will prove useful. I hope that the lack of a female presence here will encourage some reader to produce a much-needed book on West German women filmmakers.[7]

NOTES

1. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982).
2. Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: a Critical Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 57.
3. Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 19.
4. The quote is from Hans-Jurgen Syberberg, *Syberbergs Filmbuch* (Hunich: Nymphenburger, 1976), p. 11.
5. John Sanford, *The New German Cinema* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1980) and James Franklin, *New German Cinema*, (Boston: Twayne, 1983).
6. Jan Dawson, ed., *The Films of Heilmuth Costard* (London: Riverside, 1979), p. 6.
7. Readers are referred to three special sections on German women filmmakers in JUMP CUT. Nos. 27, 29, and 30; as well as *Camera Obscura* No. 6 (Fall, 1980) and Marc Silberman, "Cine-Feminists in West Berlin," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5, No. 2 (Spring, 1980), pp. 217-232.

The photographic image of underdevelopment

by Edmundo Desnôes
translated by Julia Lesage

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This is a translation of an essay that originally appeared in the magazine *Punto de Vista* (*Point of View*), Havana 1967.

Our heads are full of mountains, cities, faces, situations and objects. In our memory we store thousands of tidy images which we have never personally seen but still know.

We hear about our heavily mustached great-grandfathers and Sarah Bernhardt; about the soldiers in World War I in their trenches; about the Kremlin and its gilded onion domes and New York and its skyscrapers; about Martí all dressed in black, against a backdrop of vines and rocks, and Gandhi, gaunt and semi-nude; about the African jungles; about the moon craters and Hiroshima destroyed by a nuclear blast; about John Kennedy's assassination; about Japanese gardens; about Lenin and Mao Tse Tung; about the microbes in a drop of water and the spiraling of a galaxy. Immediately a corresponding visual image comes to mind, and almost always it will be a photographic one—we remember a photo seen in a book, magazine or newspaper.

Photography has created and added to our reality. It constitutes an inseparable component of our knowledge of the world.

But reality and photography are *not* the same. In art criticism, *photographic realism* has become a pejorative term, signaling that a photo is being received as no more than a crude slice of life. Such reception occurs often, even in the U.S.S.R., where the word *realism* enjoys an almost magical prestige and has become a password: "I can't understand abstract painting," asserts Soviet painter Pavel Korin. "I'm against photographic realism, but I'm a romantic realist." Even those like him who would defend realism against all odds reject photography, which they find cold and impersonal.

Nevertheless, photography has deceived everyone. There's no con game more persuasive than photography. In fact, images are no more than the expression of the invisible person working behind the camera. They are not reality but rather

form part of our culture's language. The photojournalist or artist selects and chooses the angle, the exact moment, the light, the image itself. Any given reality can be seen through thousands of photographic eyes.

Photography does not provide objective truth. It can be as abstract as Jackson Pollock's paintings. There are takes on a situation, visual interpretations — as seen in electronic photos of stars or of atomic nuclei — which only specialists could recognize if the photos had no captions. Like painting, photography forms part of people's cultural reality.

Some years ago a Catholic missionary had a bright idea: drop food packages into an area of the Venezuelan jungle inhabited by Sirishana natives. Along with the food and trinkets the priest dropped many photos showing jovial smiling images of himself. Herein lay the project's originality. Once the natives had become familiar with his image, he intended to parachute down from the sky.

He assumed the natives down there would recognize him and associate him with food's prosperity and trinkets' magic. He chose what he thought was an auspicious date, the Epiphany, January 6. He landed among people he assumed to be already catechized, and not much time passed before those innocent Sirishanas had eaten him for a snack. The natives indeed had gathered up the photos and studied them with real concentration but had not seen anything. To their eyes the portrait's light and shadows appeared as chaos. They did not identify, know how to look at, or recognize anything in a simple photograph. Whether apocryphal or authentic, this tale tells a truth. Photography is not a direct experience but a cultural event within a context.

We live in a physical and visual age. In the twentieth century, objects overwhelm everything. We have merchandise in every color and form, movies, magazines. And photography inserts itself into almost all of this.

Photographic criticism, however, lacks ideas. Or it is merely rich in technical details — describing the newest model camera, a special light meter, or a soft brush to dust off the lens. Such criticism, directed primarily at amateurs, is promoted by manufacturers who just want to sell their products. But to analyze how photography expresses contemporary humanity, we still do not have an intelligent, systematic mode of criticism. We rarely analyze images. Rather we look at them mechanically, subconsciously incorporating their content. We accept photography like fabric design or stage props. In our heads, press photos merge with world news; a familiar portrait with everyday life; and a magazine photo with our morning coffee. Sometimes we have a hard time separating out what we saw in a photograph from our flesh and blood experience of people and things.

It is really fascinating to try to clear up this clutter, to try to analyze all the ways that photography has become tied up with our everyday experience. It's a delicate operation. Photography remains tightly bound to economic and political interests, as well as to dreams or to art. For us in Cuba, for example, the photographic image of underdevelopment constantly meshes with our own experience and has become a decisive ingredient in how we view the Third World. We live in that world yet hardly realize how we have been conditioned by the photographic viewpoint of the other world. We often base our own self-image upon journalistic advertising, fashion, or art photography, which presumes to express our milieu.

Photography is a much more influential and pervasive cultural ingredient than most people can discern.

ADVERTISING AND FASHION

My first contact with photography ended in disillusion. fifteen years ago my imagination seized upon an old colonial town, Trinidad, as I saw it in a book of photos, *Trinidad de Cuba* by Esteban A. DeVarona. The placid images of solid colonial houses, a milk man riding on a burro down the cobblestone streets, the white screens and stained glass, mountains viewed through the pattern of an old balcony with black bars and shadowy interior patios — in my mind all these images blended into one image of a romantic colonial paradise. Now I think (then I never even suspected it) that what really engrossed me was the vision's tight unity. Each photo contributed to a general feeling, an aura: Trinidad appeared like a worn out village but with no impurities. I had seen a lot of colonial buildings around Havana, but the strident modern rhythm of the city engulfed everything. Business, mass transportation and politics had erased their facades.

Then I visited Trinidad. Just our arrival was enough to overturn my dream. We did enter the town on cobblestone streets but in a '51 car. The contrasts scratched up my romantic photographic vision. Our car, the buses, and the other vehicles moving through the city didn't have anything to do with those photos of Trinidad. In the book I only saw burros, horses, and carts on the streets. To see the mountains through the grill of a balcony, like in the photos, you would have to sit on the floor or be a dwarf. Later I heard how much the Trinidadians rejected those huge round cobblestones which destroyed their shoes and the springs and tires of every vehicle. The photos of Trinidad that I had seen were lies, a photographer's vision, almost a dream.

That disillusion bore fruit for me. From that moment on, I understood how photography was part of the world of culture and a language for interpreting, expressing and controlling human life.

Eight years later *Life* magazine tried to pull the same stunt on us in Cuba. This time the pictures were in full color, embellished with the slender beauty and exotic presence of a group of professional models. The women filed by and were photographed in a romantic and dreamy style [by Gordon Parks]. "In the midst of the tropical colors and the historical splendor of Trinidad, Cuba" (*Life* magazine, May 5, 1958). Now the lie was complete: Trinidad's ruins had become inhabited by modern nymphs. The models wore Panama hats inspired by those "used by Cuban sugar planters." The women climbed the belfry of San Francisco monastery to see if someone were coming down the mountains on a white horse and they wore "evening coats of flowing taffeta," so that their figures would easily stand out from a distance. Other models stood caged behind the high, intricate iron work of windows, under the stained glass' brilliant colors, and in the patios' shadows with the flowers out of focus. This time I recognized the fantasy even though the models were really there. It was the photographer's fantasy. This time I didn't even try to visit Trinidad in order to meet a Spanish landowner's daughter or the landowner himself, who had the presence of "a Spanish grandee." With sadness and pedantry, I understood that a photo always approached a vision more closely than real facts.

If photography belongs to culture, then it can legitimately use any and every artifice: camera, lighting, exposure, angle, or any trick of the camera obscura. For that reason, fashion and advertising photography both constitute a valid and authentic utilization of the medium, for both partake of the illusory function of art.

Very little difference distinguishes how a press photo lies — let's say one of Adolph Hitler in Paris prancing ridiculously in front of the Arc de Triomphe — and how a *Vogue* cover does. The photo of the Nazi dictator just seems much more real than the one of the model posed in an eccentric gesture with a huge hat (although possibly she's very much more alive now than Hitler).

An infinite number of photographers reject and despise reconstructed images. "Ambient light," however, is as much a problem of style for them as is "high key." These people have not understood that truth in photography is itself an illusion. Irving Penn and Richard Avedon — consciously or unconsciously — still have to use studios, cameras, and dark rooms just as much as the French impressionist painter, Pierre Bonnard, for example, used canvas, oil and brushes. The elderly Picasso stated it precisely: Now we know that art is not truth. Art is a lie which allows us to approach truth or at least that truth which lies within our grasp. The artist must find the way to convince the public of the absolute truth of his or her lies.

Few photographers live so enmeshed in this world as those responsible for creating an illusion of beauty for women or for transforming a stupid bottle of rum into an intensely decorative visual object. They are creators of dreams and lies. They satisfy and exploit the realm of possibilities. Their images project concrete, profound, social and psychological realities.

Advertising implacably uses photography to lie and deceive. None of us will likely find ourselves suddenly enjoying the sun and waves of a deserted beach, nor will we probably be sitting drinking Barcardi rum next to a dazzling blonde. Everything that people sell gets photographed under the most favorable light. This photography represents the materialization of a desired but unreachable ideal. Thus an advertising photograph can become converted into a symbol, as mythical and as intoxicating as the religious images of Fra Angelico. The winged angel of "The Annunciation" is as evocative as the image of Suzy Parker introducing the lipstick shade "Persian Melon." (Someday Suzy Parker will be remembered as the model for certain pieces of advertising as much as Simonetta Vespucci is for the Renaissance paintings of Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo.) Capitalist advertising images symbolize our industrial civilization in which the right to consume is more ingrained than freedom of religion, for example, or even freedom of speech. All people today demand the right to consume. With light, smiles, youth, exoticism, sharpened or blurred edges, and color — advertising photography creates an ideal reality.

Everything becomes subordinated to the right to consume (production) and to enjoy (profit). Capitalist laws and institutions favor current production and search out potential consumption. And the Third World seems a world to be used — an available pleasure, a product. In advertising it becomes an exotic background with deserted beaches, folkloric costumes, and solicitous natives; there a tourist can vacation in paradise. The natives live there to satisfy the tourist's needs; even the landscape is obliged to appeal. Recently in a magazine I saw an excessively sweet

and repulsive old woman in a bamboo rocker surrounded by three courteous and abject servants. Two men were dressed in white, both wearing a kind of fez and picturesque apron. One refreshed the old woman with a delicate straw fan, and the other held a fragile umbrella over her head (both the fan and the parasol were typical craft objects made by hand). Kneeling before the old woman, a young native woman was hanging a garland of flowers around the woman's wrinkled neck. Everybody smiled. It is a full-page advertisement for an airline (*Time*, Nov. 11, 1964). Under the photograph you can read in tiny print: "Photographed at the Raffles Hotel, Singapore." The style of that photograph was as dated as a 1935 calendar of the flat, superficial postcard-style illustrations in *The National Geographic*. Nevertheless, it has an inevitable impact. A lot of times the advertising photos that capture our eye lack aesthetic originality. When ideas, impact and creative imagination do converge in an advertisement, that advertisement achieves the same quality as a good painting, but it also has the advantage of mass distribution. Naturally there is a strong dose of alienation in commercial art, a dependency upon the vicious cycle of desires and consumption.

Other advertisements demonstrate products from the Third World which you can enjoy. Ads for Colombian coffee utilize a color photo of a peasant. Wearing his sombrero and his cool white suit, he stands blond and smiling next to a cart with large primitive wheels and a crude sack of coffee grains carefully placed on the floor of a photographic studio, probably in New York. Grains of coffee especially harvested for the industrial consumer!

In advertising, underdevelopment, in fact, exists in flagrant contradiction to that image: it is a world of hunger, social chaos, and parasites in bodies as well as in governments and economies. You just have to remember this: two-thirds of the world's population lives hungry, and most of the world lives in points on the map like Singapore and Colombia.

These advertising photographs do not express social reality. Rather, they express the ideals of a society filled with indifferent consumers and ruthless producers.

Fashion photography shares the supreme artifice that advertising images have—although the fashion photographers are more sophisticated artistically. Ads generally sell a product that is as well defined and which stands out. Everything is obvious; yet fashion images are smiling and mysterious, saturated with ritual posturing.

Here, too, we encounter an ideal of beauty and pleasure. Images have to change constantly so as to capture the eye's attention. A primitive environment is especially perturbing; the contrast between rustic life and expensive and artificial fashions always attracts the glance. That's the case with certain photos by Saul Leiter who uses the Third World for a set.

The first example that comes to mind appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* almost five years ago. A full-lipped model is looking out a rough window of a Latin American hut. In her right hand she holds a branch of limes, with leaves included, and she wears an enormous starched white hat while, bored and sensual, she looks condescendingly at a native girl. The little girl with long dark hair stands outside and touches the window sill tenderly with her diminutive hand. The photo is flat and we only recognize the hut because of the rustic window and a strip of dry palm

leaves hanging from the roof. The girl's dark hair contrasts with the model's white headgear, and everything is unified by a screened surface — as if there were a metal screen-which produces a reverberating image. Underdevelopment is utilized here to elicit surprise and to enhance the exotic elegance of the woman's headgear. The child looking admiringly up at the model above her adds an extra element of glamour, and, of course, a pretty pathetic one.

Last year (1964), Leiter repeated that gimmick in *Harper's Bazaar*, this time in an underdeveloped urban environment. Two opposing pages suffice to give a vision of Mexico: you can enjoy an enchanting romantic vacation there. On the left, "A pristine, white eyelet evening dress is being serenaded by the Lindo Orchestra at the Hotel San Angelo." On the opposite page we see a street scene: in an enormous poster which advertises a brand of cigarettes, we see the singer Jorge Negrete with his huge mariachi hat. "Dressed perfectly with no effort at all, black as lava," the model leans against the billboard and imitates the open mouth of the Mexican singer with two native girls also trying to imitate Negrete. The image has a certain ingenuous quality: the huge image of the singer, the sophisticated model, the old chipped walls, and the two little girls shrieking. By accident or deliberately, the photo is neatly divided into two by a white reflection, which erases part of the billboard (the words of the advertisement, because this picture is trying to sell fashion and not cigarettes).

Everything picturesque and exotic and beautiful within underdevelopment gets incorporated into photography. The environment is used to create an illusion that in that place tourists will live out a passionate, amorous adventure, be admired by all the natives, and — if everything else fails — have an excellent landscape to restore their eyes and their spirits. The most accomplished images, like those of Leiter or Gordon Parks, are efficient and crude at the same time. And this image of underdevelopment does not just come from the Western countries. We ourselves often fall victim to the form in which others see us. Thus we often lose our own perspective and we corrupt our own image of ourselves, so that we live out a lie instead of understanding it as a projection. We see ourselves as others from industrial countries see us, or as they want to see us. In Western Europe just as in the Soviet Union and the other European socialist countries, people cling to a distorted image of underdevelopment.

In fact, the socialist countries understand the latent violence that exists in those countries which have been exploited for centuries and kept outside of the margin of history; yet sometimes these countries, too, look upon us as primitive children living in an exotic landscape. On the cover of a book about the Cuban agrarian reform published in the German Democratic Republic, we see a photo of Norka, one of our most famous Cuban models, dressed as a militia woman with her rifle pointing to the sky. In the background there's a drawing of a succulent, luxurious, imaginary pineapple.

The jokes they make and the disdain the capitalist countries have for the Third World culminate in the photos like those that appeared in the summer 1964 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* — the African continent serves to inaugurate a line of exotic furs, hats, and showy stockings. One photo used two black faces, sad in their humiliation, to highlight a red leather shoe made from snake skin or crocodile. Those solemn blacks would have the moral right to cut the throat of any white

person who wears shoes like that.

There is an exoticism and elegance in all these photos, that's for sure, but also cruelty. It's the cruelty of using people as decorative elements. Here there is no deception as with the humanitarian mask worn by the great colonizing powers in Africa. The photo above expresses the real relation between oppressor and victim: disdain and exploitation on the part of the colonizer, and humiliation and blind hate in the guts of the colonized. This photo by Gordon Parks is more eloquent than any political pamphlet.

This lack of awareness sometimes brings us to a ridiculous extreme: the ad campaign for Tergal, a new no-nwrinkle, durable fabric, produced an ad in *Paris-Match* (1965) which featured three men in colorful shirts and big pointed hats — Mexicans with rifles in their hands. On the top in red letters appeared the word "Revolution" and on the bottom, "Tergal, a revolution under the sun." Another lie is perpetrated by photography. We know it. We are living out a real revolution.

THE PRESS

Life does not imitate art, as Oscar Wilde believed, nor is the opposite true. Art "means something." It provides a world of interrelated cultural values. That's why so often we find ourselves in a situation which seems like an art work that we know or we find ourselves in front of art works which seem to imitate life.

These multiple mirrors have often confused us. Recently I ran across artificial fashion images in the streets of a Mexican village. There were two living myths, Brigitte Bardot and Jeanne Moreau, walking down the street of Cocoyac surrounded by a chorus of little children who were looking at them and smiling. This photo appeared in the magazine *Elle*, illustrating an article on Bardot and Moreau filming VIVA MARIA in Mexico. Something which seemed completely posed and artificial in *Harper's Bazaar* became a street event in Cocoyac, right near that hacienda which Emiliano Zapata and his soldiers destroyed during the Mexican Revolution. Both women are dreams in the flesh. They came walking out of a fashion magazine to become world news.

In the beginning of our century, the photos of the Mexican Revolution created the most powerful international image of Latin America. The peasant from one country became the symbol of a whole continent as photos and etchings of the humble armed peasants of Mexico were reproduced throughout the world. After the revolution, for more than forty years, the broad-brimmed sombrero and the loose white pants and shirt provided a universal representation of the Latin American — whether Cuban or Brazilian, Peruvian or Argentine. A local image became a generalization.

Not until the Cuban revolution did a new image of Latin America circulate internationally in photographs: the beard of Fidel Castro and that of his soldiers, the bearded revolutionaries. If the image of the Mexican revolution is the product of both photographs and etchings, the Cuban revolution has been reproduced in Paris, New York, Peking, and New Delhi almost exclusively through photographic images.

The huge sombrero of Zapata's followers and the bearded rebel are firmly

developed and imprinted in our contemporary memory. They are photographic images disseminated by books, periodicals and magazines all over the world.

Press photos are not the result of an impartial eye. We can easily discover the slant, bias, and intention of any photo in a newspaper or magazine: a photo might be used to provoke aversion, fear, disdain or hate or to awaken our sympathies and make us feel justice or indignation. We just need to observe the international press photos of Fidel Castro since the revolution, for example, to discover if a publication supports or opposes the Cuban revolution or simply observes it like a spectator. Sometimes it's not even necessary to read the captions.

I was in New York in 1958 and 1959. Being Cuban, I read the newspapers closely. It turned out to be fascinating because I discovered how the photographs were adjectives that subtly qualified the revolution. One day *Time* published a photo of Fidel reclining in front of a hut in the Sierra Maestra, apparently resting. If memory doesn't betray me, I think that in fact he had covered his face or had a hat or book resting on his chest. Immediately I could see that this photograph opposed the revolution, that it showed Fidel as if he were a bum, indifferent and sleepy. In the United States, where the puritan tradition exalts work as the greatest virtue, this was the worst criticism that you could level against a Latin American.

In early 1959, *Look* published various stories about Fidel Castro in which Fidel appeared like a friendly leader, sympathetic, human, and smiling. However, a cover of *Life* during the same period presented him as a barbarian, reckless and without breeding, a man who appealed more to fanaticism than reason. He appeared as "a Mongol conquistador," as Herbert Matthews described the image. Other times, as in *Holiday* magazine, he was shown behind a desk in an office or as a brilliant lawyer. And all of those pictures created portraits of the same man.

In the magazine *Soviet Union* and in *Viva Cuba* (a book about the trip of the Cuban leader to the USSR), Fidel almost always appears smiling, embracing Nikita Krushchev during his visit to the USSR, or amicably conversing with workers in a factory or with Soviet leaders. Fidel is also shown as our revolution's symbol, with a heroic gesture emphasizing his stature and patriotism. This image is both dignified and paternalistic, and is captured in a flat academic style. Images in the Soviet press are determined by how the Soviets conceive of society, the Party, and its representatives' function. Fidel is a prestigious leader in the Third World, a revolutionary hero, a man loved by his people, always affable. And photography assists this vision even though the vision's usefulness gets limited by the conventionality of Soviet photography, where even today many press photos are posed and even retouched.

Sometimes the caption's inference enters openly into conflict with the image's slant. Thus, photos of Fidel taken by Lee Lockwood during the July 26, 1964, celebration and published in *Life* have this ambiguity. *Life* uses the caption under an image of Fidel playing ball with the North American journalists in order to neutralize Lockwood's friendly lens. The editors tried to prove that if Fidel appeared likable and affable, that was just a pose, a demagogic gesture to win over the press.

Cuba never formed part of the French colonial empire, so in Paris journalists could observe the situation in Cuba with more emotional detachment, even as something

romantic. In France, Fidel is a Robin Hood; the Cuban revolution means the awakening of Latin America. But the French press can't help falling into exoticism. *Paris-Match* (Sept. 7, 1963) published an article on Fidel going underwater fishing. The photos by Pick emphasized a primitive hero, a Caribbean Ulysses. Our underdeveloped Fidel appeared shirtless and barefoot, the photos emphasized his corpulence and vitality. The first sentence of the article proved the exotic bias international news has in representing the "backward" world: "This calm cod fisherman swimming in Caribbean waters — in those very waters in which a world war has almost exploded — is Fidel Castro." And we see captions like this: "On board his ship *Bravo Cuba* the head of state becomes a character out of Hemingway." Or, "It's 5:00 PM and still he hasn't eaten anything since last night."

Fidel's Cuban image is multiple and spontaneous; one photographer who has best captured the lived aspects of Fidel's public and human personality is Alberto Korda. First he showed the hero of our war of liberation, Fidel high up in the Sierra Maestra, in a photo that later was used for a dramatic poster during the October missile crisis with the caption, "Commander in Chief, at your command." Then Korda went on to take images of Fidel conversing animatedly with people in all parts of the country: a cooperative, the street. And Korda also offers us the human image of Fidel in the Soviet Union trying to ski and slipping and falling in the snow. Such an image unmasks any false personality cult and affirms Fidel's humanity, the natural fallibility of people using materials they have never had to dominate.

Now this variety of visions and interpretations of reality sometimes limits our Cuban photographers. They often let themselves be carried away by the situation, by the image itself, instead of dominating the image with their own intelligence. The technical level of Cuban photography is very high in comparison with any other country in Latin America; just look at magazines like *Siempre* or *Cruzeiro*. Still, the contemporary Cuban photographer has not yet fully grasped the way that photography is also a form of expression which should function like a language.

Even very specific images tend to get turned into symbols; the mind assimilates them as exemplifying a much broader reality. The smiling natives whom *National Geographic* presents in its unimaginative photographic style have surpassed that and become for many people the "reality" of African, Australian, or Latin American aboriginal societies. These photos remain an unconscious ingredient in our minds and function each time we think about the world's primitive peoples. The photos have left us with the vague impression that these communities live in a kind of paradise, where people have not yet tasted of the fruit of good and evil.

The smiling Central American stevedore loading a heavy branch of bananas becomes an image of all stevedores, and it is used to convince unsophisticated viewers that United Fruit Company is the best possible thing that could ever happen to these candid children of nature.

If *Time* publishes an image of a South Vietnamese's decapitated body abandoned in a field after battle, the photo does not just represent a war zone. It becomes proof of the Vietcong's cruelty. Sometimes such an image backfires and is transformed into a symbol of man's inhumanity to man and of the horrors of war. This happened with the scandalous Associated Press photo of a regular soldier from the reactionary South Vietnamese army deliberately sticking a knife into the guts of a Vietcong rebel.

Photography, I repeat, is transparent. You just have to know how to look. You could discover, for example, the North American attitude toward all of Vietnam in the expression of the Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, tall and Anglo-Saxon, looking down over his shoulder at General Kahn as if at a repulsive toad (*Newsweek*, Jan. 18, 1965). Press photos always express some kind of judgment, and this interpretation easily becomes "truth" for mass publication's unsophisticated victims. If you looked at a contemporary photo of two white, blond, dead mercenaries surrounded by a group of Congolese rebels with spears and strange headgear, you might momentarily forget that whites have enslaved, exploited, mutilated, and despised blacks for centuries, and that even today in Africa, for every mercenary that the rebels manage to liquidate, the mercenaries assassinate dozens of Congolese. But many can forget all this when they see such a color photo in *Time* (Jan. 1, 1965) accompanied by the following caption: "The savage conflict: Wearing grotesque regalia, Congolese rebels rejoice over dead mercenaries."

Soviet photographs, for example those showing Krushchev during his visit to India, Burma and Indonesia in 1960, make a political declaration. They have three basic themes: masses, political leaders and industrial development. The following images — flat, stereotypical photos which appeared in different Soviet publications — each reveal an attitude: Krushchev's being received by Nehru or Sukarno; a garland of flowers being hung around Krushchev's neck by an innocent, "typical" little girl; innumerable official receptions in which functionaries toast a lasting friendship between both countries; visits to iron foundries or steelworks or a state farm where agriculture has been mechanized; the crowds in New Delhi or Jakarta hailing the Soviet leader in the streets.

The Soviets usually make accurate generalizations, but too sweeping — the leaders, the masses, production — and they often overlook details. Indeed, the Soviet style is the opposite of the North American and Western style, one where details are presented as if the detail told the whole story.

In fact, press photos provide valuable documents about the style of a given historical period. They show people's body language and dress style, how people have regarded themselves, and how individuals are related to everything in their milieu. Sometimes, however, photojournalism transcends the documentary and creates profound images, symbols, and art. Press photographers never stop clicking their shutters, so they constantly have an opportunity, at one moment or another, to shoot a profound image, in which composition and event become unified in an unforgettable photograph. This happened with a press photo taken of Lumumba a few days before his assassination. He had just been arrested and a soldier forcibly turned his head toward the camera. That created a pathetic image which has infiltrated and impregnated our consciousness — it shows a physical humiliation which no white chief of state would ever endure. Such a gesture could happen only in a colonized country, where the individual is not granted respect and where the Western powers have so denied the natives their humanity that the underdeveloped themselves (in this photo, the soldiers are all black Africans) doubt their equality to other people, especially to white people.

The North American press offers two images of underdevelopment: either a rich environment, safe for tourists and for investments, or social chaos. Revolution and the entry of backward countries into modern technology, dignity, and history

appear inverted: as the proof of backwardness, of a world which screams when it ought to speak in a modulated voice like the whites, which uses bullets instead of laws to enforce justice. The Soviet press uses photos to present the masses, deprived for centuries of their human rights and ready to throw out their rulers, or, if that's already been achieved, ready to build a new society under the direction of nationalist leaders.

In any case, all photojournalism contains a trap. Constant pressure and a leveling effect inhibit the creative development of artists who work for the news. This iron cast deceives us with its uniformity. Press photographers always find themselves obligated — consciously or unconsciously — to photograph things in a mediocre, uniform style to insure that the observer's eye never discovers the secret: that photography is a lie, with everything depending on an individual photographer's focus and point of view. Photojournalists have to stick to the established style, with slight personal modifications, so that images in magazines and newspapers do not contradict each other. Editors and publishers want to sell photographic images as the objective truth. That's the source of the problems which creative people working in photojournalism face.

Cartier-Bresson, who began using a very personal style, ended up without any visual personality at all after he founded the photography agency, Magnum, and began to work for magazines — and on assignment. In contrast, Eugene Smith abandoned *Life* magazine because he could not agree with how his pictures were cropped and laid out. He fully understood how they were using him, and treating him badly, how they were deforming his work. But only a few can extract themselves like this, and they do so at the risk of remaining bitter and out in the street. Economic pressures require many photographers to work for publications, conforming to a rigid pattern. Almost unconsciously, their style begins to deteriorate, losing the force of a profound and authentic vision. If the institution of photojournalism would let a creative photographer develop his or her personality and point of view, everyone else would discover that photography does not provide the objective truth. Every photographer would have a style, just like painters do. And you'd easily see an individual's interpretation and language. Of course, once this secret is out, no one will believe in photography's informative truthfulness. That's what gnaws at photographers who both have to earn a living and want to be creatively expressive.

If we used photojournalism as a language, as a form of dialectical argument, we would enrich our world. Such photography would not deceive but rather it would function as an instrument for intellectual labor. We could, as a people, consciously empower ourselves with all the resources within our reach in order to understand ourselves and express our world.

ART

The Family of Man is probably the most widely distributed individual collection to give us a photographic image of the residents of people on this earth. It's the work of one artist, who selected the 503 photographs taken in 68 countries for an original show. Edward Steichen — as the exposition's catalog clearly signals on its cover — created the show, selecting images and arranging them with a defining structure. He interwove images from underdeveloped countries and emphasized them within his total vision.

The exposition was based on a preconceived idea. As he points out in his introduction, Steichen tried to prove that "the art of photography is a dynamic process giving form to ideas and explaining people to people." He conceived of the exposition "as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life." The first part of this quotation validly defines people as cultural beings. However, the second part is objectionable. When he affirms that this collection is "a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life," he excludes photography from art and deprives photograph of its essential creative function. And when he presumes to demonstrate that this collection provides "a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind (sic) throughout the world," Steichen promotes a dangerous illusion and social fantasy. He'd have been much more accurate if he had tried to present the inequality of the world's peoples. All conflict and violence in the contemporary world in part arise from differences between people, differences determined by the continent and the system under which they've had the luck or misfortune to have been born. This is especially true in my own case — speaking from the point of view of an underdeveloped island which is desperately trying to overcome backward social and economic structures and to participate in the dangerous but inevitable adventure of modern humanity. We are entering into history and ceasing to be squandered and abandoned humanity.

One image by Eugene Harris was selected as the exposition's theme: the Peruvian Indian who smiles while playing his flute. It is symbolic — a romantic, ingenuous symbol of the unity of all peoples. It fails to consider that the Latin American Indian lives in abject poverty, simultaneously exploited and rejected and abandoned by the wealth of an industrial era. Children such as this Peruvian Indian rarely live to adulthood. Steichen thus distorts this image and wrenches it out of social reality.

The first topic set forth in the exposition is "love." Then and there we are witness to a visual lie. An indigenous couple from New Guinea (in a photo by Lawrence LeGuay) appear courting. That image is laid out next to Italian couples, North American couples, and French couples. Yet, love in the jungle and in ignorance does not mean the same as in civilization amid comfortable surroundings. A few pages later we have "infancy" — as if children were the same in India, Lapland, Austria, the United States, and Cuba. However, the sophisticated and secure existence of a little blonde girl, photographed by Arthur Penn in New York, has very little in common with the life of a child in starving India or with children in the cold country of Lapland or with a child's life in Cuba where it's tropical and underdeveloped.

Such a lumping together is repeated throughout the exposition, whether about work, democracy, justice or truth. The exhibition's structure corroborates the fundamental difference between sociology and artistic reality. Photography is an idiom, and it can lie as easily as words. I cannot accept Steichen's vision, but I must see it as coherent and effective, at least artistically. His style is consistent, and he offers a very persuasive, romantic image of human solidarity.

Let me make this clear: the world's backward regions would never have played such a conspicuous role in an exposition 50 years ago. The ease with which many people accept this equality, at least visually, represents a development in world consciousness. But that acceptance also contains its own way of hiding an

important factor: equality here has become a photographic ideal, not a reality. We can only understand all this when we understand how photography works as a language, one which we ought to grasp fully so that we understand the meaning behind its words.

In fact, advertising and fashion photography use the world's underdeveloped regions in a way that approximates much more closely the real, abject situation than does the "humanity is one" theme proposed by *The Family of Man*. Steichen's interpretation does not provide us with the experience of reality, as he might assume, but with an illusion.

Lee Lockwood recently worked in Cuba for a few months on a book of photographs that were to interpret contemporary life on our island. One afternoon we were discussing a book about Cuba published in the United States. I called Theodore Draper the most informed critic of Cuba, but the least aware of what was really going on here. Draper had all the information, but he was prejudiced and used that information against the revolution. Cuba is an emotional experience, a moral one, and without experiencing that reality it is impossible for a critic to understand anything. Lockwood said he thought that his own book would be meaningful because with photos, he could communicate emotion, vivid details, and the revolution's aura. He was right: photography does recreate experience emotionally. A visual image is essentially emotional. It utilizes the five senses, bodies, expressions, and objects as raw material a lot more than literature or painting does.

Nevertheless, when photos reach the level of aesthetic synthesis, they immediately become transformed into static experiences. That's clearly the case with Cartier-Bresson. His "decisive moments" are always complete in themselves and transcend objective reality to create a closed-off interior unity. Every aspect of the image gets entwined inside the composition and closed down by the frame. Cartier-Bresson's photographs from Indonesia have this paralyzing effect. Viewers are impelled to believe in the perfection of that photographic reality because the image is so harmonious in and of itself. "Don't change anything," they feel moved to exclaim — like stupid tourists in some exotic and primitive country. The image's closed-off architecture creates a kind of beauty which tends (as the Greeks thought) to justify itself. Art frequently creates a comfortable, self-sufficient world removed from action.

"The sense aroused by an impure art are kinetic feelings, the feelings of desire and repulsion," explained Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

"Desire moves us to possess something, to move towards something; repulsion moves us to give it up, to get away from something. Arts which come out of those sentiments, either pornographic or didactic, are therefore not pure art. The aesthetic emotion (now I'm using this in its general sense) is in and of itself static. Spirit remains paralyzed and above desire and repulsion."

The viewer frequently feels paralyzed facing a successful Cartier-Bresson. He emphasizes the geometric designs of Indonesia's rice paddies, coconut trees reflected in the water in between the tufts of rice; a relation between the figures in the background, working, and a solitary silhouette in the foreground which easily allows us to enter into the image. This closed structure also becomes clear in viewing the relation between the two market women, both carrying baskets on

their heads. One shows off her youth, with downcast eyes and arrogant breasts, and the other, an old woman, squarely faces the first one, with a laughing glance and flat dry breasts. Cartier-Bresson uses the same kind of harmonious integration in images of India and Mexico as well.

Alvarez Bravo, with his photographs of death, architecture and simple Mexican life, has the same cold quality. Eugene Smith's images of Albert Schweitzer in Africa are more dynamic but still rest too much on the myth of the great white doctor who plays Bach in the exotic black jungle. Robert Frank has tried to get far beyond the mere appearances of underdevelopment. More than anything else, it's because his vision of humanity contains many shadows. It's the opposite of a dramatic or exotic image and utilizes moments of abandonment more than any decisive highlight. Frank's images of Peru (the few I've been able to see) are pathetic. Beyond that, Frank has a dialectical understanding of photographic imagery. He never pretends to capture and isolate everything in one image as Cartier-Bresson does but rather gives a fragment of a whole, one that could be constructed out of interrelated images. Penn's photographic essay on Peru, although seemingly only skin deep, manages to bring to light the ingenuous exhibitionism of Lima's poor, and he uses knitted masks in a way that is faithful to the Indian personality's introspective passivity. Penn also uses irony subtly to mock exoticism.

The principal limitation most creative photographers face when they film outside their own cultural environment is that they tend to work with clichés and conventional ideas. They might make successful images but with a stereotypical content. This can occur as often with Cartier-Bresson as with Eisenstaedt, Emil Schulthess, Eugene Smith, or Penn. Mexico gets shown as full of color, Africa as wild, Negroes as physically beautiful, and India as religious and esoteric. The artists photograph out of their own prejudices and end up with a series of simplistic, flat, one-sided images. Nevertheless, the photos have a huge impact the situations photographed, even though superficial, overwhelm us because of their concrete reality.

So there's this image of Cuba, for example: it's a tropical paradise with innumerable natural beaches, sensuality, and mostly happy people full of tropical rhythm. At least this was the image generally perpetuated in fashion, advertising and art photography. Then the revolution forced many of us to reconsider our own image. Now we have another image, more dramatic, of Cuba as a country making a revolution. Still, when many photographers, including those sympathetic to the revolution, visit our island, they tend to see us as enchanting, primitive beings who have achieved "revolution and partying," revolution and relaxation, at the same time. Cubans always seem to express themselves with their bodies and never with their intelligence. The reality is that any revolution is a rending experience.

Papp Jenő, a Hungarian photographer who visited Cuba in 1961, had a weakness for romantic, sensual images and exotic landscapes. Even though his book shows the modern side of Havana as well as the rural zones, cane fields, and modern industry, Papp still gets trapped by and ecstatic over romantic, elemental, and simplistic appearances. He insists on the typical and the exotic — from street vendors to crocodiles in the Zapata Marsh. And he films with such stylistic and technical backwardness that his style is at least twenty years old.

Lots more things exist in Cuba than any photographers have seen, even today. And

many eyes have photographed what they've seen there. One of the best visual interpretations comes from a portfolio by Walker Evans (it appeared in *The Crime of Cuba* by Carlton Beals in 1933). Evans' eyes interpreted our street people's broken lives. He has a 1930s sociological vision, but his understanding of dynamic contrasts and his spontaneous composition rescues many of his photos from being mere visual documents. If most photographers, even the most creative ones, have not produced any more complex image of underdevelopment, it is because of their limited experience, little time spent there, and real limitations on their profundity. They almost always spend just a few days in a country so that they could hardly produce a complex vision. Photographers instinctively glue themselves to the superficial image, which they find in people and places. They have eyes full of preconceived ideas and a superficial understanding of each image's content. Although they constantly encounter objective reality, they easily fall prey to auto-suggestion so that they end up believing they can photograph creatively without understanding the cultural meaning behind gestures and situations.

The most important ingredient in photography always remains invisible: the photographer. This feeling, thinking, knowing and understanding being is what determines the quality of the image.

To interpret a community visually requires time and letting yourself be inundated by the milieu. Underdeveloped countries are themselves photographically backward, lacking a profound image of themselves. The people live alienated because others use them for political, economic or touristic ends — distorted even by those who aspire to present them faithfully. In our part of the world, around the Caribbean, we've known some exceptions; probably there are others. Underdevelopment also signals an isolated world, one with defective, always fragmentary, communication.

After five years in Venezuela (1955-61), Paolo Gasparini created a meaningful and coherent image of that country. He assimilated Strand's experience and applied it creatively.

In his sharp images, everything gets paralyzed in order to let us see — with that intense tranquility only possible in art — the terrible poverty and stubborn pride which convulsively surrounds our highly industrialized era. All Gasparini's images of Venezuela are shaped by his vision of underdevelopment. Even his landscapes convey the abandoned existence of people oppressed by nature's immense cruelty. The mountains are crushing. In the midst of those mountains — just as in the plains and in the jungle — people become insignificant but still remain dignified and persistent. Gasparini shows an image of three white houses against a background of dark mountains. It denounces all human stubbornness to acquire land and prosper in the midst of such a gigantic and rough natural environment: the black mountains, the white frames of the houses, the stones in the abyss.

Men and women and children rivet their attention on a photo until the repetition of gestures and situations releases for them the key to the photo's intention: people who are often disdained by humanity; children with their parasitic bellies who don't understand the scribbling of letters; youth who cannot find work and who stand around looking at the vermin, surrounded by their own children in the door of their own home. The underdeveloped world is also underutilized. The potential humanity within each individual gets lost and broken.

Gasparini built his vision upon residue: dirty, worm-eaten, broken, peeling wood; walls covered with wounds and bruises; children always playing with empty cans from imported products; the cold, abstract machinery of outsiders extracting petroleum; white, blonde women appearing in Pepsi-Cola posters covered with dust and dirt; ridiculous, armed military men; cemeteries surrounded by oil tanks.

Gasparini did not accept what he saw, the facades which other photographers had accepted as reality. He wasn't satisfied to pass by without stopping and to go around the things in the "background." He went in and stayed there. A lot of super-sophisticated people easily admire underdevelopment's facades, such as colonial architecture or rural life in Latin America. They love to see the integration of landscape and architecture, the rich and surprising textures of old decaying walls, the harmonious proportions of adobe huts and peasant shacks. That was the beauty in Leiter's photograph of an exotic, primitive hut with a fragile model posing behind the window. It's the only thing many photographers and architects have ever looked at — never the life inside. Gasparini went into these humble houses. He stayed in a lost village in Venezuela, Bobare, and he photographed interiors. He wrote,

"You have to go inside these homes. As white as they are outside, they're black inside — black from poverty, filth, and a hearth fire's smoke, which because there's no chimney stays suspended in mid-air below the roof. They are so dark and black that it is impossible to photograph them."

But Gasparini did go in, and he did photograph in the darkness. He captured the crumbling filth: the broken fireplace, the old suitcase abandoned from a trip to Caracas which in fact never took place, the treasures on a shelf — one old shoe, two empty cans, a leaking casserole and a bicycle seat.

"You have to go inside these houses, without being afraid of getting dirty as you touch those little children who are dirty because there isn't any water. You do it to understand these people a little better, their homes, their community; so as to know the landscape, with its dry thistles like wrinkled women with dry breasts, dry like people who only have skin, bones, and a burnt-out expression left, dry earth, skin wrinkled like "the texture of a wall." To understand all this a little better you have to approach it with more love, understanding and awareness; without prejudices or judgments that are too superficial and too hurriedly formed. We must go inside these homes and not stop outside at the facade. We must try to understand these people, talk to them, and not stay sitting in our cars pointing at them with a telephoto lens. Pity doesn't work."

Photographers often miss such a vision because they visit underdevelopment a little like tourists and stay there briefly. They want to convince themselves that life in the backward zones is not so terrible and that people there have compensations — compensations based on a harmony between people and nature, a satisfaction with manual labor, primitive culture's creative expression through work and dance. Because if those people are equal to us even though very different, we don't have to worry or have a bad conscience. All people are then equal — poor or rich, hungry or living in abundance. Just like philosophers, photographers imagine utopias.

Gasparini's rural images have been complemented by the work of Daniel Gonzalez. This Venezuelan photographer emphasizes the contradictory nature of modern Latin American cities. His photos are based on the surrealistic clash between grotesque, underdeveloped behavior and ruthless socio-economic change. He has selected the most suggestive and explosive images: the miserable shacks constructed in the hills around Caracas out of the city's cast-off things; boxes, posters, fragments of torn billboards showing an eye, a stupid smile, or lost words; a display window with a doll with a crutch, advertising crutches for children; a neon sign of a skull advertising a tailor shop.

In Cuba we have the penetrating vision of Luc Chessex, a Swiss photographer who has lived on this island for almost four years. His images, like those of Frank, don't try to show every aspect of a situation but rather a shadow which projects something — the corners, the eloquent detail. He has enriched our national image by adding complexity to that face. He's refuted the stereotyped vision of Cuba as a happy, playful paradise. Chessex has discovered the abstract, concentrated face of the Cuban when dancing. Until now the emphasis has almost exclusively been on the dramatic, sensual, and extroverted gestures of our rhythms. Chessex has photographed various dancing couples who look like they are having a conversation or meditating — abstracted from both time and external reality. His photos of Fidel discover that image spontaneously integrated into the community: country villages, walls, work centers.

Chessex has seen how imagination and reality are united; in Cuba, these are not opposed as they are in more developed and organized societies. The most anachronistic elements merge together, not artificially juxtaposed as in surrealism, but naturally. In the same store window, we may see a flag, an orthopedic girdle, a photo of Fidel, a shoe — nobody finds that incongruous. But Chessex caught it by surprise and revealed it. White mannequins modeling clothes for a population that has a high percentage of African blood become the image of a blonde woman surrounded by heads with thick, kinky black hair.

And Chessex sees how Cubans insistently consume everything and judge and talk with their glances. Here we depend mostly on our eyes to understand the world: we analyze others looking directly, face to face, and often when we're out on the street, we'll even turn our heads around to see what's going on. It's a primitive form of communication and our way of judging our compatriots. In other countries, people look at each other out of the corner of their eye. In various images, Chessex has captured the meaning of our way of looking: Cubans turning around to see what's going on, looking at the camera; two groups crossing the street where even the kids size each other up as they go by; people staring at something strange. He has surprised us, meditating or serious, whereas other photographers have just seen us dancing and smiling and shouting. Every creative photographer adds a facet to our cultural reality, and that new vision emerges as much from objective reality as it does from the lens' focus.

Mayito is the Cuban photographer who has insisted most on searching for a photographic language which is not illustrative, one which expresses. In his search he has moved past spontaneous imagery and into geometric composition; away from textures into expressionism. But he's a real artist. He shows us a pair of pleasure-loving Cubans timidly stepping into the water holding hands, and this is a

good example of photographic psychology. Here, the Cuban, normally in full control of his or her vital space, seems to be defenseless while facing the ocean's hugeness. It's our small island confronting an image of universal vastness.

Different historical periods each have their own characteristics. To capture those moments in an image, anecdote, or account lets you intensify reality through revealing it. The moments become historical epiphanies. We have a mural-sized photo of Fidel giving two farmers a deed to a piece of land. Mayito shot it in the "Three Ton Bar" and it shows just how the Cuban revolution was in 1959. It was an epoch of transition, where agrarian reform existed alongside private property and capitalist advertising. In the foreground of Mayito's photo, people in Havana appear celebrating and having a good time; it's the year of our joy and liberation from dictatorship. Later will come the years of construction, sacrifice, work, and education. This image by Mayito is a visual epiphany of our year 1959, the year that the Cuban revolution triumphed.

Mayito shot Fidel and Jose Martí in a public gathering so that they looked like two faces more among the crowd. The faces looked like an integral part of Cuban life and an expression of our national spirit. Fidel and Martí in the arms of the people during a parade became the mundane expression of the best of Cuban history, behavior, intelligence, and creativity.

Photographic artists interested in capturing the real image of reality, its face, still lie just as much as the ones dedicated to advertising, fashion, or news. They all create a vision. Creative photographers modify the image and turn it around upon themselves. It's thus easier to say "a Cartier-Bresson" than "a photograph of Mexico," "a Eugene Smith" than "Africa," or "a Penn" than "a street in Lima."

CONCLUSION

The vision established through thousands of photos about, around, or thinking of the Third World can only be interpreted partaking of a cultural language. Otherwise, we will always be used by or trapped in a visual lie and through a concrete form of deception: the photograph. As Joyce thought, art tied to action and propaganda is impure. But culture is always impure, like people. We cannot talk about art by using a static, purely aesthetic conception of it. Impurity is necessary; art feeds on impurities.

Culture serves as an instrument for our human development; it's the language and image of our journey here in society. And in that journey, nothing is secure or static. It's a struggle in and with the entire complexity of the world. Art serves to sell things, dream to, meditate, understand the world and see it, masturbate to, hate, love and contemplate. And photography has the same protean nature as our convulsive, impure epoch — but it's also a dynamic epoch, facing the future, infinity, and the most profound aspects of human beings and their history. We live in an artificial world of values — culture — that is humanly created. If art means anything, it means awareness, an awareness that lets us ensnare our own life. And contemporary photography — infiltrated into almost all levels of our culture — perhaps offers us the best framework through which to examine our fluid consciousness. In the printed photo, even ideas are made flesh.

For a long time we've been discussing these issues among ourselves, trying to

define art out from other cultural manifestations and trying to separate out its impurities.

It was stupid to try. All that should interest us is the language people use to function in the world and make sense out of their existence. Art is no more than a part of culture. It doesn't have defined borders. It does not have defined limits. It cannot exist isolated from the social dynamic that also includes politics, science, economy, journalism, sociology, psychology, and above all history. And it takes a position.

All that I have written here also comes out of a very specific point of view: in each of my words I have placed my camera on the side of the Cuban revolution. I write from the point of view of underdevelopment and its relation to the rest of the world and to contemporary history. I do not offer a criticism from a New York, London, Prague, Moscow, or Peking perspective but from that of Havana, and in the year 1965. This is our own era. My article demands that you understand us in terms of our need to liberate ourselves from capitalism's physical and psychological exploitation, to the point of our demanding aid from the socialist world and from all of humanity. And it is not just our problem. As Martí put it, the world's equilibrium rests on us.

In our time the photographic image of underdevelopment represents a worldwide phenomenon: it exists in the visual and historical consciousness of the world. It is what we dream (a beautiful paradise in which to show off the latest fashions or to visit for romantic vacations, attentively served by a native in a luxury hotel). It is the expression of our fears and desires (social revolution, impatient peoples, raw materials, cruelty, abject poverty, justice, fierce resentment, ignorance, and aggressiveness). And it is also what people imagine they could be when they have ideals (brothers and sisters, *our* brothers and sisters, us, human beings).

Notes

Translator's note: In the essay, "Cuba Made Me So," Desnôes does a close re-reading of "The Photographic Image of Underdevelopment," updating it for the 80s. His point of departure is the increasing circulation of imagery from and about the Third World. He warns,

"The image only invites us, it does not commit us."

In "The Death System" he pays tribute to Susan Meiselas' photography and analyses how pictures of mutilated corpses elicit different readings in North America and Latin America. In "Will You Ever Shave Your Beard?" he discusses how U.S. television creates and manipulates icons that reduce any gap between fantasy and social awareness. These three original essays appear in Marshall Blonsky, ed., *On Signs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985). — JL.

Learning together

Synthesizing economic and cultural analysis in the Marxist study of Third World film and video

by Chuck Kleinhans and Manji Pendakur

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We learned a lot from each other in team teaching a course on Third World film at Northwestern University a few years ago. Each of us had a very different background and training in thinking of the subject matter. Manji's experience was in the political economy of communications and rested on institutional analysis. In contrast, Chuck's previous work centered in cultural analysis using an aesthetic approach. Both of us shared a Marxist perspective, which helped us understand our common agreements and our distinct differences. Since that time we have continued to work together as colleagues and friends in developing our research and other interests.

We've developed a fuller understanding of some of the major issues and concerns in dealing with Third World media. We believe that the study of Third World media must be interdisciplinary, multifaceted, and flexible. It must find ways of combining economic and aesthetic concerns, institutional and cultural approaches, social science and arts and humanities studies.

While our experience is unique in some ways, we see that we've been able to overcome some of the usual barriers that separate radical academics interested in culture and communications. Here we want to share what we learned — first, in teaching the course, and subsequently in teaching other courses and pursuing our mutual and diverse projects — in hopes of encouraging other cultural and intellectual workers to also learn together.[1][[open notes in new window](#)]

We hope it will be useful for teachers planning courses, researchers, students, and critics developing an analysis of Third World film, and to film and other media makers, especially in the developing world in thinking about the challenges they face. In addition, this essay functions as a broad introduction to our continuing collaboration.

Economic and Cultural Analysis

For both of us the most important experience of teaching the course was in what we learned from each other. Our backgrounds had important similarities and differences. We were both Marxists with practical experience in student activism

and commercial and radical media work. Both of us believe that the development of Marxism and revolutionary movements in the Third World in the post-WW2 era is vital in providing an expanded understanding of political and cultural change. We shared significant political agreement, and this solidarity helped us work through differences of background, training, and specialization. That's what inspired us to write this article, for we have each grown greatly from interacting and exchanging around these differences which we see as significant (and highly unfortunate) divisions within the current left analysis of culture.

Essentially, Manji's graduate training at Simon Fraser University stressed large scale economic and institutional analysis of international communication. His research interests have centered on consideration of Canadian cultural dependency, international communications issues, and Indian mass media. The communications specialists who have pioneered this type of research are people such as Nicholas Garnham, Thomas Guback, Armand Mattelart, Michelle Mattelart, Herbert Schiller, and Dallas Smythe.

Chuck's academic background is training in comparative literature and aesthetic theory, an experience which emphasized the close study of specific texts and the investigation of cultural problems from a speculative and critical, rather than empirical view. His research has focused on issues of mass culture, particularly as they have developed in recent film studies concerned with ideological analysis using Marxist, feminist, semiotic, and psychoanalytic understanding.

As many people know, these two different approaches are not only divided conceptually, but they are also separated by discipline, department, professional organizations, conferences, and publications in a way which we feel has ended up robbing Marxist study of culture and communication of its most vital combination: the analysis of institutions in political economy terms as well as the close examination of specific cases in terms of critical consciousness. We see an unfortunate, in fact destructive, chasm between these two areas that have developed increasingly powerful and sophisticated analyses and produced immensely significant work. But separated from each other, each is impoverished. The economic analysis of institutions often concentrates on issues of imperialist control and domination, but collapses into one category information and imaginative communication, news and fiction. It often thoughtlessly reproduces high art assumptions about the nature of culture, especially mass culture and entertainment products. And its implications for policy frequently fit in with traditional liberal assumptions about state intervention and a crude and co-optable cultural nationalism. It ends up with little to say to activists and artists.[2]

Radical aesthetic studies of Third World films are differently but equally limited when isolated from a fuller economic and institutional analysis. Films are often discussed with no conception of how they have been shaped by the specific mode of media production in their nation. Films are treated as "texts" with no recognition of their simultaneous existence as commodities (even in socialist economies). While drawing political conclusions about the value of a specific work, the actual diffusion and reception of films is ignored.

The separation of sociological and aesthetic analysis in North America and elsewhere has hampered intellectual growth and analytic power. In our own department and university, rigid assumptions of intellectual legitimacy and

disciplinary boundaries keep people divided from each other's work, and sometimes from each other on a personal level. In this general atmosphere, we've been nourished by the establishment and continuation of organizations such as the Union for Democratic Communications, an alliance of progressive academics and producers of media. UDC conferences have an energizing mix of radical scholarship and practical examples of media activism.[3] In a related development, for the past few years traditional communication analysis has been challenged by strong showings of interest in feminism, academic marxism, and other approaches in the [U.S.] Speech Communication Association and the International Communication Association. Various conferences and film and video festivals have also had an important effect of bringing together, often for the first time, diverse people with shared interests. We also want to acknowledge the important development of national and international cooperation in the field of media. UNESCO has been especially important in this regard, and various international organizations have encouraged practical and scholarly cooperation in the ongoing analysis of the global situation.

Synthesizing both economic and cultural analysis is essential for a fuller view and it is especially necessary to develop the theory and practice of alternative and oppositional media. The crucial merging of these two types of analysis will have to take place with a developed sociological understanding as the mediating point for a synthesis. At the same time, we certainly don't see ourselves as having overcome all the differences and problems. But it's also clear that an important convergence is beginning to take place that promises a productive dialogue, if not yet a synthesis, between cultural analysis and institutional investigation.

Third World: The Concept

We use the term "Third World" not as a geographical indicator but as a political and economic concept.[4] Politically, the Third World nations are those which have experienced colonialism and neo-colonialism. But the concept requires an economic and historical understanding too. After all, the United States and Haiti are both former colonies which gained independence around the same time, but their subsequent and present economic situations are totally different. One became an imperialist superpower, the other has been the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere.

What made different Third World countries and their cinemas interesting to study were the common threads that bind them together: their historical experience under imperialism, the legacy of underdevelopment and cultural domination, their past and current struggles to overcome the vestiges of imperialism and to resist imperialism's new economic, political, military, and cultural forms. Thus, economic, political, and cultural liberation is the framework within which we analyze these cinemas in their respective countries

An essential foundation for understanding the Third World is historical analysis. Reinterpreting history and rewriting it have been major concerns for Third World intellectuals because their histories have been written for them, usually by people from the metropolitan countries with built-in biases (such as the "white man's burden," the superiority of European/U.S. education, emancipation through high technology, etc.). Studies such as Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and Eduardo Galeano's *The Open Veins of Latin America* are essential

reading for understanding the material and human exploitation of the Third World. As the once colonized countries liberated themselves, they needed to reconstruct their history from their own point of view, with an interpretation all their own, which is an ongoing process in much of the world today.

In teaching about this, we make a special effort to focus the students' attention to the need for reinterpreting what they have learned formally and informally and the complex problems that exist in so doing. U.S. students, in particular, having grown up living at the top of the imperialist pyramid, often have little or no exposure to cross-cultural understanding. The first step is simply to help them understand the ideological assumptions that make them take their reality as "normal" and as a sufficient guide for comprehending (and inevitably judging) the rest of the world. We start with considering how the dominant media portray the Third World in both news and entertainment programming.

After developing a critique of the existing media, usually based on current examples, we move on to a reconsideration of fundamental assumptions about the Third World. For example, to get beyond the usual dominant explanation that the high rate of population growth is the principal cause of Third World poverty, it's necessary to examine contemporary structures of economic domination between nations, the imperialist legacy of one-crop and extractive economies, as well as the economic and social nature of the peasant family, among other things. It's also essential to consider the actual nature and effect of population control policy and measures often brought in from the capitalist core, such as involuntary and coercive sterilization (we use the example of Puerto Rico).[5]

We also think it's essential to analyze the Third World with attention to the present international scene and its institutions. Obviously the historical nature of colonialism and imperialism must be discussed as background as well as the development of national liberation movements and socialism in the Third World. The current role of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, multinational corporations, and other global entities needs to be considered. Another vital concern here is distinguishing the range of political and economic systems in the Third World. Latin America provides examples ranging from Cuban communism to Brazilian capitalism, from progressive democracy in Nicaragua to harsh dictatorship in Chile.

This implies, in turn, consideration of the class formation in these societies, both in the period of colonial rule and after national liberation. We need to identify the classes that benefited from the "changing of the guard" that took place when European powers conquered certain Third World countries, and also the classes that were shored up to act as pillars of imperialism, often for centuries. A full class analysis must also take into account other significant differences within a nation: regional, geographic, occupational, linguistic, racial, religious, gender, and other cultural and social differences. The role of different classes during the liberation struggle, their present status, their links to the metropolitan countries, and their relation to a certain country's development and/or underdevelopment all need consideration as well as their role in the actual or potential transformation to socialism.

Culture in the Third World

The term "culture" has come to mean several different things.[6] In the broad anthropological sense, it refers to a "way of life," embodied in social relations, processes, and material objects. A society's cuisine and dining, for example, contains all three aspects. In a much narrower and more traditional sense, it refers to intellectual and artistic activities and products: the domain of a Ministry of Culture. Our own use of the concept is a broad one, reflecting our concern with considering media arts within a strongly social understanding. In Marxist terms, our analysis is one that recognizes the realm of production and the realm of reproduction, base and superstructure, the economic and the cultural.

In this context, we view national culture as a stratified phenomenon, which is usually in a state of active contention with imperialist imperatives. In some cases, as with India, a pre-existing culture was eroded by the penetration of British values, particularly in the national bourgeoisie. In other cases, as in Cuba, a native culture was totally destroyed, and a colonial slave society was established under Spanish control, which was followed by, in the 20th century, U.S. economic and political domination of the nation until its revolution. It is important with this understanding to analyze the contradictions and resistance taking place in culture under colonial and neo-colonial domination. In Third World countries, we can often find the simultaneous presence of a traditional agrarian folk culture, an artisanal and often urbanized popular culture, a highly commercialized and often imported mass culture, and sometimes an active resistance culture and sometimes a revolutionary culture.

From this perspective, we can understand a long development of cultural resistance, taking place before and after national liberation in various forms and media, and look for its further development in the new society and how that in turn would impact on cinematic experience. It's helpful to look at film in its relation to other arts and forms of communication as well. For example, while not dealing with film *per se*, Jean Franco's *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist* provides an excellent discussion of the themes and forms of Latin American literature and gives an important context for understanding the region's film art and the options open to its makers.

Culture is a site of political contention: at times seemingly quiet, at other times dramatically disruptive. But it is also continuously changing. We are particularly skeptical of elite notions of culture that dismiss commercial mass culture as simply a vehicle of foreign (or national) domination. Such ideas often rest on dubious assumptions about the passivity of the popular audience and the hypodermic injection of "false consciousness" in the otherwise ideologically pure masses. Any analysis of cultural domination must also include a discussion of cultural appropriation — how people actually receive, understand, and use that which is available to them. A case in point: we've seen several mentions of how the Hollywood Tarzan films present a totally distorted view of Africa. Yet a Black South African student once told us that when he saw the films as a child, he and everyone in the audience understood that this couldn't possibly be Africa because the foliage was all wrong, and the "natives" didn't look like Africans. They concluded that them must be a part of the United States where Tarzan lived.

Cinema and Communications

We think it's essential to understand any national cinema in its relation to the

entire communications system of a country. Many of the generalizations and categorical statements made about Third World cinema are wrong or inadequate without a fuller context. Particularly in the present with the dramatic expansion of video production and diffusion, to speak of film as if it were a discrete and autonomous entity is to cripple understanding. We need a good general sense of the state of communications in the different media — print, radio, television, film, data transmission — and technical and institutional development, literacy, etc. Obviously, small nations and very poor ones cannot be expected to develop a full scale film industry given the immense capitalization required. India, with about 800 features a year, displays a very different situation than Grenada or Fiji, with none. In some nations radio and television may be much more significant than film ever can be as a vehicle for national culture. We also need to understand the cultural "mix" in a country. In many Third World countries, music and dance are much more significant parts of the national culture for economic, historical, and cultural reasons than books or newspapers which demand literacy for comprehension.

As it has developed, cinema is basically a Western mode of expression and largely depends on Western technology. And Hollywood films have been early and fundamental carriers of Western culture in the many-sided importation and dependence on Western media in the Third World. Thus, it's necessary to include a discussion of how cultural domination is manifested in different countries and what attempts have been made by the respective governments to adapt to or overcome that situation.

In this perspective, the state of development of a national cinema is a factor of the larger process of cultural domination and the efforts of people and governments to liberate themselves. It is important to understand how a concept such as national cinema might appear differently in different societies and in terms of the kind of meanings it would evoke, depending upon that country's political economy in relation to its place in the international economy. For example, a national cinema in a monolingual country like Cuba has a different meaning from a national cinema in India with 16 officially recognized languages and about 300 dialects. Cinema's function differs widely depending on a particular country's stage of development — in that capitalist cinema (from Hollywood, Bombay, or Rio de Janeiro) is primarily a profit-making industry which also serves to reinforce dominant ideologies at a given historical moment, while cinema in countries where socialist transformation is taking place will be markedly different. Two cases in point would be Cuba and India, which have dynamic film industries, the former with an internationally recognized critical cinema and the latter with a large capitalist sector and a small, but surely important, state-funded "New Wave" cinema, which has attempted to break from the commercial film tradition both in form and content. Also, we recognize the fact that in some countries cinema has grown largely with direct state intervention, and that this direction has included mandates about its role — often restricting political expression, as in the case of Brazil.

Northwestern: Our Own Institutional Situation

There's an important matter that needs to be understood about being Marxists at Northwestern University. It's very clear to us that the opportunity to teach Third World film and other subjects as Marxists is in many ways a function of being in an

elite school.

The course we originally offered enrolled both undergraduate and graduate students, almost all majors in our department, Radio/Television/Film. Intended as a general introduction to recurrent issues and questions within the broad spectrum of Third World cinema, the course was offered under the rubric of "Studies in National Cinema," which opened it to undergrads who had completed the introduction to film history and criticism course, and to all grad students. We began with some ideas on how "we" in the First World look at the Third World, then developed an extended political and economic analysis of imperialism, which was extended to a discussion of cultural imperialism. A discussion of films from India set up some typical types: the mass culture entertainment film and the independent realist cinema. We went on to discuss some Latin American films in terms of specific issues and Canadian film as an example of dependency as another form of imperialist domination.

All but one or two of the twenty some students had some film- and video/tv-making experience and all had some introduction to critical and historical approaches to media. Few of them had any developed political consciousness. Northwestern is an elite private school with about 8500 undergraduates and a small graduate school. The tuition compares with other private schools such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford — about \$11,000 a year at present, plus room, board, and other expenses. The class composition of the student body is predominantly the sons and daughters of the capitalist class and the professional-managerial stratum, with a substantial number of very bright and talented lower middle class and working class scholarship students. The school is overwhelmingly white. The small number of Black students (about 7%) typically come from professional-managerial families. There are also Asian-American students and a few Latinos. The graduate program in our department attracts some foreign students, particularly from the developing world, due to a number of factors, including faculty interest, a well-established African studies program and a Program on Communication and Development Studies which we work with.

Thus it was not a great surprise the first day of class, when we asked the students to introduce themselves and to give their experience or interest in the course, to have one undergrad say s/he knew nothing about the subject, but the class was offered at "an awfully convenient time." The next speaker was a grad student, a Black political exile from South Africa who had lived and worked in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, who was interested in the course, "to learn how to make revolutionary films."

The actual or potential class position and privilege of NU students, their training as future leaders and decision makers, ensures both that they are open to learning a Marxist analysis and that the institution is quite ready to give it to them. After all, many of our majors will be working directly or indirectly in the international culture industry. Naive xenophobia and simplistic anti-communism has relatively little place in the corporate establishment, where most of our students will find their careers. But in general, they will live and work within a framework that unquestioningly accepts the dominant order of things.

Those who end up in international communications may be a bit more liberal, for they will be making deals with MosFilm executives, Beijing Film Studio managers,

and culture ministers of underdeveloped nations. Making commercials for Jamaican tourism, developing campaigns for right wing candidates in Latin America, selling reruns of *Dallas* in Africa and South Asia? You bet. We say this not to be cynical, but to be realistic. We know what the general past history of NU graduating classes has been. But of course we cannot predict the specific future of any one of our students. In that gap we teach and try to develop a critical, materialist consciousness. And in some ways and in some cases we succeed. But in fact, it is the successful development of socialism throughout the world that creates the material and objective conditions for our employment: the capitalist class and its managers have to know how the other side thinks.

At the same time, it must be understood that NU is institutionally totally within the dominant capitalist and imperialist order, and this has very clear and direct consequences for individual faculty and students. NU is a large holder of stocks in business firms doing business in South Africa, for example. The spring before we taught the course, NU hosted a huge Ford Foundation sponsored conference which was a patent whitewash of the apartheid and divestiture issue. No divergent opinion was allowed, however innocent, and a spirited student protest took place during the event. Subsequently, protest organizer Dennis Brutus was denied official university support when he encountered visa problems. A tenured professor of English, distinguished Black South African writer, political exile facing a prison sentence if returned, and leading activist in organizing boycotts of U.S. athletic events involving South Africa — Brutus faced a long and drawn out immigration proceeding and trial which he finally won. In a continuation of this policy, the university was insistent on prosecuting about 100 students for sitting in the administration building in a 1985 divestment protest, and again in a 1986 protest.

Though some Marxists can be on the NU faculty, in a hiring decision the spring before we taught the course, Julia Lesage, the Marxist-feminist film critic and videomaker and co-editor of JUMP CUT, received a majority vote for hiring in the Radio/TV/Film department, but the decision was reversed by the Dean, Roy V. Wood, in the face of tenured faculty opposition. Then R/T/F chair, Jack C. Ellis, declared in the student newspaper that if Lesage was hired there would be "too many Marxists" on the faculty. (There are reasons to suggest that Lesage's feminism was actually more threatening than her marxism, for at the same time, many male faculty and students were being frequently, openly, and intensely challenged in class by feminist students.)

Recently, Barbara Foley, a Marxist professor of English, was denied tenure by the administration, after being recommended by the faculty, specifically because of her vocal opposition at a campus appearance of the Contra leader, Adolfo Calero. The administration was looking for a scapegoat after Calero was doused with a red liquid by two protesters who escaped, and it singled out Foley, who had been continuously active in campus leftism. Firing Foley served the administration's current goal of transforming NU into a research institution heavily subsidized by corporate funding. In the same vein, in spring 1987, our department agreed, by apparent unanimous agreement, to hire radical mass communications specialist Eileen Meehan, only to have the decision overturned by the chair, Larry Lichty, and Dean Wood who explicitly said she would not fit in with research directions desired by the Ameritech Corporation which had given the school a \$500,000 grant. As Marxists we can hardly be surprised by such actions, for Marxist analysis shows

that under capitalism the universities serve the needs of the capitalist class.

We have the privilege of being tenured and openly Marxist in our professional work and teaching, and we cannot forget that in other places today this is not possible. And in recent times, one could not teach as a Marxist at Northwestern or in most U.S. universities. But the other side of that privilege is that we have little ability to effect institutional change at NU, particularly in the absence of a dynamic student movement, staff organizing, and a progressive faculty coalition.

A Course Syllabus

We made a few mistakes and had a few problems the first time through. Here we want to present an improved, second generation syllabus for the course to give an idea of what we think is important to cover and in what order. We based the course on our own areas of specialization: Latin America, India, and Canada. African, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian cinemas were not covered, but provide ample and interesting examples. In subsequent articles we will discuss related teaching covering subjects such as contemporary Central America, the political economy of international communication, and Third World film/video theory, and provide a detailed bibliography.[7]

Northwestern uses the 10 week quarter system, with classes meeting two days a week for two hours a session, which is characterized by some students as a "binge and purge" learning situation; what follows could be easily expanded in the semester system.

1. Introduction.

Administration; class introductions; introductory lecture on defining the Third World. Film/video excerpts to show how the dominant media portray the Third World, followed by discussion.

Current TV news always provides examples of hot-spot location reports by network news "reporters" who don't know the local language. Christian TV missionary pitches are also easily seen as ideological, as are clips from jingoistic films such as *Rambo*. Less obvious is the imperialism of using the Third World as an exotic site for a First World romantic hero — *Casablanca*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *The Killing Fields*, *Under Fire*, etc.

2. The First World Looks at the Third World.

Reading: Edmundo Desnoes, "The Photographic Image of Underdevelopment" [published in this issue of JUMP CUT]; excerpts from Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (NY: International General, 1975). Introductory readings on imperialism. Lecture: Introduction to the history and economics of the Third World; basic concepts and terms.

We develop a critique of dominant images, using current examples from print and TV, but also criticize Dorfman and Mattelart for not dealing with the pleasure and entertainment of Disney and having a simplistic and moralistic "hypodermic" theory of ideological indoctrination. Excerpts from Disney's *Three Caballeros* and *Saludos Amigos* work well here because they were part of the conscious WW2

"Good Neighbor Policy" ideological offensive by the State Department, Rockefeller interests, and Hollywood. It would also be useful to show and discuss an ethnographic documentary at this point. Originally we used Felix Greene's *The Enemy: What Every American Should Know About Imperialism* (NY: Vintage, 1971), which is clear and contains a superb analysis, but which is now dated in its examples and details. We don't know a current substitute.

3. Capitalism.

Reading: on imperialism. Lecture: economic development of capitalism; its transformation into modern imperialism. Film/discussion. Exerpts from the animated film, *The History Book*; Part 1, "A Flickering Light in the Darkness" (Dark Ages to feudalism, rise of merchant class, exploration); Part 5, "Triumphant Symphony" (Industrial Revolution, rise of finance capital, labor theory of value) [review by John Hess in JUMP CUT no. 6 (Mar-Apr 75) 78].

We think it essential to give the students a good preparation in the historical, economic, and political development of imperialism as the "highest stage of capitalism." We find that our majors usually lack such information or familiarity with history, economics, and politics as types of analysis and information.

4. Imperialism.

Readings: on imperialism. Lecture: capitalism and imperialism, class stratification in the in the Third World, different states of development.

5. National Liberation.

Readings: selections from classic writings such as Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara, plus material keyed to later films or national topics. Screening: *Battle of Algiers* or *Burn!* (both Pontecorvo) or another dramatic feature on colonial or national liberation history serves to raise key issues, particularly violence and military resistance to colonial oppression.

6. Multinationals and the International Information Order.

Readings: *NACLA Report* 16:4 (July-Aug. 1982) on the International Information Order. Selections on multinationals and communications from Armand Mattelart and Seth Seigelaub, eds., *Communication and Class Struggle*, 2 vols. (NY: International General); Thomas Guback, *The International Film Industry*; Armand Mattelart, *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture*; Herbert Schiller, *Communication and Cultural Domination*. Lecture: contemporary multinational capitalism, emphasis on the film industry. Film: *Controlling Interest* (San Francisco Newsreel, on multinationals).

The issue of international control of communications focuses the central issues, particularly in light of the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO. The *NACLA Report* is an excellent summary. Schiller and Mattelart provide essential background, though both tend to collapse ownership into control and assume effects without considering cultural resistance, change, and selective interpretation

7. Urbanization and the Culture of Poverty.

Reading: "Cine-sociology and Social Change" (interview with Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva) in Julianne Burton, ed., *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1986). Film and discussion: *The Brickmakers*.

Economic conditions which drive people out of rural areas (and concomitant agricultural proletarianization) produce the widespread Third World phenomenon of urbanization and city poverty. This Columbian documentary shows poverty level production, merciless child labor, and raises key issues of realism and the filmmaker-subject relationship. The subject of the rural family displaced in the city treated in a realist aesthetic is very prevalent in Third World film, both documentary and dramatic fiction.

8/9. Commercial Third World Cinema.

Lecture on India and Indian Cinema. Film: *Roti, Kapda aur Makan* (tr. *Bread, Clothing and Housing*, 1979).

We thought it was important to show a highly successful mass culture film made in the Third World, and Hindi cinema provides many examples. There is comparable commercial production in other countries, such as Mexico and Egypt. This particular film is notable for its use of popular stars, hit musical soundtrack, portrayal of social issues and class differences (resolved through getting justice against a small group of villains), and representation of the family as prime social unit. Our students were intrigued by the film's violation of classical Hollywood editing and its mixture of genres (musical, martial art, melodrama). In taking the film seriously (just as auteur and genre criticism took Hollywood seriously), our intent was polemical — because many Third World intellectuals dismiss popular cinema as junk from a high culture view. We stressed understanding the attractive and intriguing elements in Hindi film. Many Hindi films are available on video in urban North American areas with substantial Indian populations. *Coolie* (Prayag Raj and Manmohan Desai) is a very popular and widely available subtitled film on tape which also works well. It includes themes of Moslem/Hindu difference and harmony, a massive strike, and resolution through supernatural interventions. We also showed an excerpt from another Hindi genre: the mythological work which transposes Sanskrit classics and legends to film.

10/11. Third World "Second Cinema."

Reading: excerpts from *Film India: The New Generation, 1960-1980* (New Delhi: Directorate of Film Festivals, 1981); Udayan Gupta, "The New Indian Cinema: A Cinema in a Non-revolutionary Society," JUMP CUT no. 8, 1975. Film: *Manthan* (tr. *The Churning*) (Shyam Benegal, 1976).

Satyajit Ray, the "Dean of Indian Cinema," provides the prime example in India of a director who successfully has had his work shown in the West at festivals and in art house exhibition. We did not teach one of his films, but if we did it would probably be *The Chess Players*, and we would emphasize the way it represents Victorian India standards of tasteful high art, moral seriousness, and lack of political outrage or commitment. The "New Wave" cinema in India has done well in prestige exhibition outside of India. In India it is only seen by the professional-managerial stratum and has no popular base. While we are interested in it and applaud its taking on of political and social issues, we also recognize its limits in not reaching a wider audience. The example we chose, *Manthan*, tells the story of a city-bred veterinarian who comes to a village and tries to set up a dairy cooperative. The film was financed by one rupee (about 10 cents) donations from 500,000 milk farmers who were members of a dairy cooperative in Gujarat. Other interesting New Wave films are *In Search of Famine* (Mirnal Sen. 1980), *Chakra* (Dharamraj,

1980), *Akrosh* (Nihalani, 1980).

Much of Third World "Second Cinema" continues the tradition of the naturalist problem play and fits into discussions of realist aesthetics. It is also productive to consider its contribution to developing a national cinema. For a provocative background on the issue applied to Brazil: Hans Proppe and Susan Tarr, "Cinema Novo: Pitfalls of Cultural Nationalism," JUMP CUT 10/11.

12. Theory of Third Cinema.

Reading: Frantz Fanon, "Pitfalls of National Consciousness," from his *The Wretched of the Earth*; Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino, "Towards a Third Cinema," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1976); Teshome Gabriel, "Introduction" and "Theoretical Context," from his *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor: U.MN. Research Press, 1982). Lecture/discussion: the politics of Third Cinema.

At this point in the course it was important to lay out the detailed argument of these essays. We have many disagreements with the Solanas/Gettino position, which is the starting point for most theoretical discussions. Gabriel's entire book is pertinent to the course, but its cost of \$44 for 156 pages is outrageous. Fortunately it can be easily xeroxed for a fraction of that price.

13/14. Underdevelopment and the Intellectual Strata.

Reading: Julia Lesage, "Memories of Underdevelopment: Images of Underdevelopment," JUMP CUT no. 1; Tomás Gutierrez Alea, *The Viewer's Dialectic*, part three, JUMP CUT no. 32; Julio García Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," JUMP CUT no. 20. Film: *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomás Gutierrez Alea).

We screened the film and then discussed it with a close analysis of several sequences. Since it is modern/ postmodern in form and mood and centers on a person much like our own students in class and political sensibility, we found it especially effective.

15. Third World Feminist Media.

Screening/discussion. *India Cabaret* (Mira Nair), or *A Man When He Is a Man* (Valeria Sarmiento).

Recently there has been an explosive development of a distinctive Third World feminism, which challenges First World feminism to rethink and redefine the goals and parameters of feminist thought, and which challenges Third World political thought and action to become truly representative of all people. There has also been a flowering of media by and about women in the Third World. *India Cabaret* is a documentary which explores the work and lives of bar performers who, in a society where a woman must be linked to a man, are economically and emotionally independent. As marginals they offer a fascinating critique of the social norm. Sarmiento's documentary on Latin machismo lets men damn themselves out of their own mouths. The result is a witty and increasingly acid criticism of male attitudes and behavior.

16. New Forms for National Culture.

Reading: Fanon, "On National Culture," from *The Wretched of the Earth*; dossier

on The Terror and the Time in JUMP CUT no 26. Film: *The Terror and the Time* (Victor Jara Collective, 1978).

The film brings out issues of forming a national culture in Guyana and imperialism's response to a legally elected progressive government (overthrow it). It uses innovative forms in a very low-ratio shooting situation and involves reconstructing history through scarce available images (e.g., from newspapers). This film was especially interesting to some students because it was close to the kind of low budget film they could imagine themselves making. Some students considered sexist the film's use of images of bourgeois white colonial women as objects of satire. This is a common problem in working with Third World film and must be faced squarely, not avoided or excused. Sexism is sexism, no matter how otherwise progressive the makers.

17. Dependency in the Capitalist Core.

Reading: Manji Pendakur, "Film Policies in Canada: In Whose Interest?" *Media, Culture and Society*, 3:2 (April 1981) and Pendakur, "U.S.-Canada Relations: Cultural Dependence and Conflict," in V. Mosco and J. Wasko, eds., *Changing Patterns of Control in Communications*, vol. 2, (Philadelphia, Ablex, 1983). Film/discussion: *Has Anybody Here Seen Canada?* (National Film Board).

While Canada is not a Third World country, by examining its cultural dependency we were able to consider another aspect of imperialist domination in a case very close to home. The film describes the underdeveloped history of Canadian cinema. It could be supplemented with excerpts from some of the most financially successful recent Canadian films such as *Porky's* and *Police Academy* as a reflection on what domination/dependency does to a national cinema in a free market situation.

18. National Minority Cinema in the First World.

When we first taught the course, we covered this topic with a Quebecois film, *Les Ordres* (*The Orders*, Michel Brault, 1974). Today it would be interesting to include one of the new films coming from the India/Pakistan communities in England if they become available in the United States, or a Cuban exile film or tape, such as *El Super*, to continue those themes. Of course there are many films and tapes to represent the African diaspora and an increasing number of Asian-American works.

19. Summary Lectures.

In addition to summarizing and reviewing the course, we reviewed the main features of Indian and Cuban national cinemas in the context of their respective national history, economic and political development, and ongoing relation to U.S./Soviet contention.

20. Final screening.

Course evaluation. Reading: Fanon, "Concerning Violence"; Julia Lesage, "*The Other Francisco: Creating History*," JUMP CUT no 30. Film: *The Other Francisco* (Sergio Giral, 1975).

The final film brought together issues of history and why history is such an important topic for Third World filmmaking. In depicting slave life and rebellion in colonial Cuba, the film sums up important issues raised earlier in the course. It

makes an especially interesting contrast to *Burn!* if that film is shown earlier.

Issues and Conclusions

Rather than an approach to Third World media which sees it only in terms of an economic and political analysis, with no reference to actual cultural objects and experiences, or an approach which seeks discrete masterpieces of feature fiction by auteur directors, our motivation was to combine, and where possible synthesize, the aesthetic/cultural side and the political economy side. Trying it made us realize how challenging and yet how necessary this was. It sharpened our interest in historical analysis, in Third World media theory, and our concern for case studies.

Many issues and themes were developed in the course which were provocative and called for further development. The role of women in making media and their representation within it were obvious concerns as well as the position of intellectuals, particularly media professionals. The aesthetic and political issues of realism, so familiar in recent discussions in Eurocentric criticism, were again on the agenda. We also saw that these issues gained considerable force from the opportunity to compare and contrast the Cuban and Indian cinemas and their national contexts and different paths to development.

Of course, there is a danger of simplistic reductionism in discussing Third World media as if it were all identical. Individual national differences and cultural specificity must be constantly in mind: one reason for concentrating on cinemas we knew well, rather than including African or Islamic work to gain breadth. But as Marxists we are also convinced that it is important to consider the undeniable similarities in Third World media, similarities which stem from the structures and histories of imperialist domination. The strength of the course was in introducing the students to central issues, themes, and styles that kindled their curiosity to probe more on their own.

NOTES

1. We first presented these ideas at the Summer Teaching Institute, Center for Critical Theory and Interpretation, at the University of Illinois, Urbana, June 1983. In addition to the feedback we received there, Julianne Burton, John Hess, Julia Lesage, Peter Steven, Keyan Tomaselli, and Tom Waugh critiqued draft versions. We draw on other teachers' work as well: Robert Stam, "College Course File: Third World Cinema," *Journal of Film and Video*, 36:4 (Fall 84) 50-61; and Teshome H. Gabriel, "Teaching Third World Cinema," *Screen* (U.K.), 24:2, (Mar-Apr 83) 60-64.

2. We realize that these are substantial criticisms of work that comes from radical intellectuals whom we respect, and we do not make them lightly. We cannot expand on them here, but will in a later article.

3. For information of UDC membership, contact Karen Paulsell, UDC, 5338 College, #C, Oakland CA 94618.

4. We understand the phrase in an operative and instrumental sense: "Third World" seems the most widely used term. We're aware of other terms such as "underdeveloped," "developing," "peripheral" and "marginal." We're also aware of

objections that such terms all tend to connote an inferiority. We certainly don't believe these nations are inferior. The important thing in developing an anti-imperialist analysis is not this or that word, but the core political concepts.

5. Ana Maria Garcia's film, *La Operación*, distributed by Women Make Movies, is excellent for explaining this. See Kimberly Safford's review and interview in JUMP CUT no. 29, 37-39.

6. For a detailed discussion: Raymond Williams, *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (NY: Oxford UP, 1976), pp. 76-82.

7. Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1987), contains an extensive up-to-date bibliography of material in English.

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Revolutionary film in El Salvador today

by Devra Weber

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Interview with Lino S., a representative of the Film Institute of El Salvador. March 23, 1986.

DW: How and why was the Film Institute of El Salvador founded?

LS: The Film Institute of El Salvador was founded in late 1980. The FMLN saw a need to record their own revolution and wanted the whole world, principally the American audience, to know what was happening over there. It is one of the very few revolutionary movements which has been recorded on film or video. The primary aim of the film institute is to supply audio visual materials to the solidarity organizations and, in turn, to the North American public.

DW: What materials have the Institute produced?

LS: There are several co-productions made with international filmmakers. *El Salvador El Pueblo Vencerá* was made with the Institute and filmmakers from around the world. Another was *In the Name of Democracy*, which was produced, directed and edited by North American filmmakers with most of the footage supplied by the Film Institute of El Salvador. Another film was *The Road to Liberty — El Camino de la Libertad*. This was entirely a production of the Film Institute of El Salvador.

DW: With the tremendous sacrifices that are being made by the people there, why was filmmaking made a priority?

LS: The media in the U.S. either does not talk about the revolution in El Salvador or, when they do, it is incomplete or distorted. Lately, there has been very little media coverage of the events in El Salvador since the Reagan administration took power. Sometimes the events shown on the news on the major networks are distorted or presented in such a way that they are easily or deliberately misinterpreted.

As a result, filmmaking became one of the many needs that the revolutionary causes had. Definitely not a priority but quite important. The need to record, to have an audio-visual record of the revolutionary process. What's really happening in the zones of control. How the civilian population is being bombed and attacked, how people are disappearing in the cities, how the electoral farce took place. All of

that has to be recorded on film.

DW: Were there any particular events which happened which precipitated it or was it more of a general need which people felt?

LS: It was a general feeling that it was necessary to provide truthful information of what was happening in that struggle. At last, some political events were quite important, like the electoral process through which Duarte was elected himself, which was a total farce. That's what *In the Name of Democracy* deals with. And once you see the film, you have a pretty good insight of what went on in El Salvador in that electoral process which took place. Camino Film Projects made the film in conjunction with the Film Institute of El Salvador. Camino Film Projects here in the United States took care of film production, directing, editing, post-production and the Film Institute of El Salvador provided most of the footage. Some additional footage was shot over here.

DW: How did this co-production come about? How did you decide to co-produce?

LS: The Film Institute saw the need for the American public to know what was going on over there. There was also a powerful need to involve and give access to North American filmmakers to participate in it.

DW: Tell us some more about some other co-productions, and in particular, *El Salvador: The People Will Win*.

LS: *El Salvador: El Pueblo Vencerá* is a Film Institute of El Salvador production in which we had help and participation of internationalist filmmakers. El Salvador is a country which has been under all forms of colonialism since the Spaniards first came there. It has a long history of repression and underdevelopment. So it is impossible to expect that a group of El Salvadorians who never manned a camera before could go right ahead and make a complete film. We need help. We need technical help and material help. And for help we turn to the United States.

We need lots of things. It is impossible to process the footage in El Salvador. The most feasible, the most important place for us is to get it processed over here. Camera and lenses and any supplies, raw stock, most of the materials, the main source is in the United States.

DW: Tell us something about making a film in El Salvador.

LS: There is a project underway now which is going towards post-production. It's a project which involves Salvadorian sympathizers who are trying to learn how to know filmmaking. These people had a very short training period. The next step was to get a camera, lenses, sound equipment, recorder, microphone, raw stock, go over there and shoot the reality from their view. We had to sit down together and learn and go for it. The film crew was made up of six people who never had any experience with filmmaking before. The first problem was in acquiring equipment. And again we turned to the United States as the main source and we managed to get cameras and finances and raw stock and all the equipment necessary to make a 16 mm film.

DW: What are shooting conditions like in El Salvador?

LS: Once we managed to get in the zones of control, in the zones of dispute, shooting conditions are the hardest you can imagine. It is very hard to establish continuity. We could shoot one day or half a day. Then we had to bury all the equipment underground and evade an infantry invasion that sometimes lasted from eight to ten days. And then go back to where we were, to the equipment, dig it out, fix whatever was not working, and take it from there and try to shoot another day or half a day. It's very hard to carry that equipment. There were no animals available because most of the animals were killed by Duarte soldiers. So everything has to be carried on our backs with the help of the people. Without the people in the zones of control, we couldn't have made anything. We got plenty of help. The basic priority was to stay alive. The second priority was to maintain the equipment. And the third priority was to stick to the basic concept.

All we learned about filmmaking had to be re-learned and adapted to those conditions. For instance if we decided to shoot this in such and such a place, a sugar mill over here, a plantation over there, we would pack all the equipment and load our backpacks and get somebody to help us and off we go. Before getting over there, we got spotted by airplanes and they bombed the hell out of us. So that caused a week's delay. And we had to salvage whatever was left of the equipment and find out who's hurt and who is not hurt. Finally, we got to the location we went to film, only to find that it had been wiped out by the same bomber who had bombed us. So on the spot, we made the decision to go to the nearest hospital to see who was wounded. At the hospital there was a man who had a piece of shrapnel or bullet in his chest, who was being prepared for surgery. So we had to be flexible and fast enough to catch that. All of this takes place under terrible heat and humidity. Sometimes you have food available and sometimes you don't. Sometimes you are dead tired. Most of the time you're very tired. And most of the time bombing or mortar fire is taking place very near by. So we never knew for sure if we could shoot the next day or not. It was very hard to stick by the original idea and try to save film.

Another problem we had was to store the equipment and store the film that was not being used. Those long retreats when we were evading the army invasions, we could not carry equipment. We could not carry anything because those were long walks which took place during the night, and sometimes they went on for eight to ten days. So we had to quickly find an underground place, or make an underground shelter to bury the equipment and then take off. And remember where it was in order to go back and retrieve it. Once we dug it out of the ground one or two weeks later, we had to open the camera, get inside, get it dry, get all the equipment in working order so we could go on filming. In the meantime, we had to survive mortar attacks, which took place quite frequently, and we tried to move from one spot to another.

Everything that we knew in theory or in practice in other circumstances, it was a different story to do it over there. Like set up camera, do the synching on the microphone, roll camera, roll sound, all of that. Some of us were constantly looking up in the sky to see if the planes were approaching. Sometimes we shot interviews which had bomb sounds in the background. And there was a constant tension that any minute we'd have to interrupt and run for cover. One time we were finishing a four hundred foot magazine, thinking about going to get another one that wasn't nearby, and reload the camera in a small village when the helicopters came above

us. Everybody took refuge under the trees. Some of us had thoughts about getting out from under the protection of the trees to shoot the helicopters with the camera. And some of us didn't want to do that. So it was a big dilemma when we finally ran out of film. The next problem was to get out of the area, carry all the equipment with us, reload the camera and survive the second bombing which took place. The sad part about it is that a great percentage of the footage gets lost when we remain there for such a period of time due to terrible storage conditions, heat and the time between exposure and developing it in the lab. And so we assumed beforehand, we were afraid and we knew that some of the footage was going to be lost. It's very painful to through so much trouble to record so much of their lives in the zones of control and then lose a percentage of that stuff. But we knew this was bound to happen before we went over there.

Previous film crews went into the zones of popular control and the zones of conflict for a short period of time. Most people stayed a shorter time because the equipment doesn't last long under those conditions, especially during the rainy season. The rainy seasons are like the monsoons in Vietnam. There's an awful lot of water coming down and the humidity seeps into everything. It lasts three to four months. So maintenance of the equipment was a major problem. But we stayed eleven months ... living with the people, just being among them. We wanted to stay longer so that we could get a better understanding of the situation rather than go in and shoot something rather fast. It was not in our plans to stay that long, yet due to the invasions and equipment breakdowns we ended up staying longer.

DW: What was the process of script writing? How was it written? How was it decided what you were going to shoot? What the films were which you wanted to do ... which films needed to be made first?

LS: Everything was done through a collective process. Some people had a fairly good idea of what it takes to shoot a documentary. You write a basic script for a backbone so you can hang onto it. And improvise around it, as we were forced to do due to the circumstances. One of the problems we encountered was that we only had 30 cans of film so we couldn't shoot on a high ratio. Everything counted. Every little take, every little scene. We tried our best to make a print ... we knew that we couldn't go back to some areas once we left for a retake. Or when we tried to go back to some areas it was totally destroyed. The people were no longer there.

DW: What is the film about?

LS: We don't have a name yet. The film is about people in the zones of popular control ... what their life is like. The sugar cane mill ... how they produce the sugar blocks and distribute it among the people. And the activities of the blacksmiths, the pottery maker, surgical procedures taking place in certain areas. We also managed to be there when the mayor of Berkeley, Gene Gus Newport, was in the area, and we managed to get some footage of that. We concentrated on shooting the regular activities of people in the zones of control. We did not concentrate on any military aspect. Even though, the military aspect is part of everyday life because, as we all know, it's a war.

DW: As you said, you are shooting a film about people in the zones of control ... but they are involved in a war. Aren't you also shooting a war ... of how people are protecting themselves?

LS: That was not the main idea. The main idea was to shoot people's lives, their production under this situation. It is impossible to avoid the presence of people with weapons. As you said, it's a war. People resort to weapons because they have to defend themselves.

DW: Sometimes there have been photographs shown of El Salvador, photographs of children and women with guns. And sometimes this is what the media picks up on.

LS: We do not emphasize those aspects because they are not the most important aspects of life at this point. It's a war, so the presence of weapons is part of everyday life. They're armed out of necessity.

We had a chance to shoot an interview with a captured soldier from Duarte's army. He was a 16 year old kid who told us he deserted the army because he had been mistreated. And I was impressed by his young age and also by the fact that most of the kids, people that young, most of the soldiers in Duarte's army, they don't have much of a choice. To be in the army is one of the very few options left for survival. And the way they draft ... I saw it happening when I was around San Salvador, watching a soccer game. The army trucks came by and took both teams, in their uniforms and everything, they were drafted on the spot. On the average their age was 16 or 17 years old.

DW: What has the war done to children? Do we need to rethink what war does and how this is reflected in the fact that children have to take up arms?

LS: What Duarte's army is doing to the people, to the civilian population, especially the children, is simply obscene. That's the real terror. When children in the civilian areas, in the zones of popular control, are bombed, they get into panic. They know that the airplane in the sky is going to drop something that will kill them. That's real terror. Yet it's also their reality. We met children who were born under those circumstances. One of the kids asked Gus Newport, "What is it like in Berkeley when children get bombed?" In other words, that's her reality and she doesn't know any other reality.

So teenagers, some of whom have lost their entire families — parents, brothers and sisters — they know that sooner or later they are going to be next in line. In EL SALVADOR: THE PEOPLE WILL WIN there is a scene in which a very young kid decides to join the FMLN. His father got massacred by soldiers and he was left alone with his mother so he decided to join. And that's a very moving scene. He was around 13 years old. He witnessed the killing of his father who was a countryman, unarmed. So it is very sad that children, instead of being taught to read and write have to resort to weapons to survive.

One of the things that stands out is the presence of children who have grown up in the war situation. How is their life, how do they perceive life and the importance given by the FMLN to the raising of children, the future generation, the seeds of the new man that are germinating. We saw children everywhere. Everywhere we went, no matter what the circumstances ... bombing or less stressful situation ... children were always present, they were *extremely* responsible, they have tasks to do, yet they are still children. And the extreme care placed by the FMLN upon the raising

and educating of the children. That was in my opinion one of the outstanding aspects of this tour, the upbringing, the education and the collective learning that children have. Even though it's a war situation, and massacres taking place, people are not bitter. People have an inner happiness that shows in the tranquil facial expressions they have. It's like the bitterness and the frustrations that are so common in traditional non-revolutionary society do not exist. And children already have a taste of what it is to have their freedom and run their own lives collectively. And that's why they fight so hard and that's why they don't want to let it go at any cost. So the incoming generation, the generation that was born under revolutionary values, is going to be a very valuable bunch of people, and in my opinion they already are examples for the next generations in the rest of Latin America.

DW: You said that this time there was an all El Salvadorean crew, and that previously there had been North American crews or combinations of North American and El Salvadorean. How did the crews differ — that is, El Salvadorean and other crews — in their perceptions of the process of making a film about the struggle in El Salvador?

LS: One of the unique aspects is that they were very eager to work in film. Salvadoreans just love film. On a few occasions they had the chance to get a 16mm projector, and show films to people in the area. Some people had never seen a film before. And it was a great challenge and a great experience for that particular film crew. It was their first contact with the war, the struggle, and their first contact with filmmaking.

DW: Do the Salvadoreans sometimes have a different perspective of what the film should be about, what they should betray or what's important ... than do North American filmmakers? Or are their visions fairly similar?

LS: Let's just say that Salvadoreans are Salvadoreans. They have their language, their culture and their ways of thinking, and North Americans have a different culture and ways of thinking. Nevertheless there is a universal language that can be spoken through film. Films can be understood any place, any time, among any people. The beauty of it is sometimes we are able to work together, and sometimes we enjoy the work done by another culture and we do understand it, and sometimes we speak with our own voice and we have the pleasure of being heard by a different culture. And hope they enjoy it too. And that's what films are all about.

As far as editorial decisions, there is no general rule. The only general rule is to make the final product available to the American public. Who does it and how it's done varies according to the circumstances. Sometimes it is the Salvadorean point of view, sometimes it is the North American point of view. There is a common denominator which is it is a just cause, it's a very resistant people, it's a very beautiful people, it's a very beautiful revolution.

DW: How are these films going to be distributed? Is there going to be an effort to distribute these films on television, or to community groups or unions?

LS: The films are available for rental, purchase information, theatrical and television distribution, from Camino Film Projects. The phone is area code 212-865-1975 and the address is PO Box 291575, Los Angeles, California, 90029. And

there are several solidarity organizations which have these films available for the North American people. We think these should be made available to a large group of people, to intellectuals, students, the working class, and the bulk of the population in the United States. It would be quite interesting to let this information get to the factory workers, to the construction workers of America, to the different ethnic groups of America, to the Black community, to the Latin community, to unions, factories, schools and so forth. If that is feasible ... once we do that, we can say that we are reaching the bulk of the North American population.

I believe in the near future, there will be an emphasis to go on to unions, factories and reach the bulk of Americans who are so misinformed, the working person to whom information is denied or to whom information is presented in a twisted manner. Can you imagine a person who works in a factory which has military contracts with the government, what is it to know that the product of your labor is being used against the civilian population of El Salvador? And think this information should not be denied to these people.

If we concentrate on the people who already know what's going on, that defeats the purpose. We want to get to the American public. We would like very much to get into the North American media and the major networks. As we all know, that's extremely difficult. Yet the footage is out there, available to anybody who wants to see it.

DW: One of the questions that people raise is that the American film audiences have been so inundated by movies, such as *Rambo* and television, that they are often more concerned with the form itself, rather than the content. Is this something that concerns you and the film institute?

LS: All you have to do is turn on your TV set, and we immediately realize that violence *per se*, whether it is justified or not, is part of everyday images that are turned at people here, at the Western industrial societies, particularly in the United States.

The American audience is somewhat spoiled by what we could call the perfect form. U.S. films are very well done in technical terms, the color is beautiful, the lenses are the best, the technicians are the best, lighting is close to perfection. So the final product, whether a feature length film or a TV advertisement, looks and sounds extremely good. That's the package. Now the content is another story. But we do know that audiences in general, and that's just not North Americans, are vulnerable to the packaging, the form. And the establishment knows that very well. That's an old story.

The Nazi Germans used that technique. Wiesenthal films in their documentaries had that look, that perfectionist look, in order to get the message and convince the people. Of course they were very inauthentic, and in terms of content the films were against everything we believe in. Nevertheless it was very effective for a long period of time. And it is affecting this society. That's how things are sold to you.

DW: How do you see this problem as being overcome?

LS: It's too much of a pretension, not realistic to us, that our film form is going to be competitive with North American films. Yet there are films made about Latin

America, about the political and social struggles of Latin America which do have that. You see a film like *Rambo* and it's very well shot, very well lit and has the best Panavision lenses available. It looks good and sounds good and has a lot of action, there's never a dull moment, yet the content is pure garbage. If you can use this same technique but adding to it a content which is worth it, this is ideal. Yet we must take into consideration that to reach that sort of audio-visual, technical quality is almost impossible under the conditions existing where we shoot film and the budgets available to us. So it's a combination of shooting in a war situation and economics. We have a \$2500, almost obsolete 16mm camera. The good thing about it is that it took a beating and it still works. Amazing. We knew that if we took some very sophisticated film equipment, it wouldn't last more than a few months, and we wouldn't be able to afford the initial investment to start with. The lenses are not the very best available. Again, it's a discussion point where to invest incredible amounts of money to take the best optics under conditions if you know that fungus will grow inside the lenses, or it might get shot and blown apart. It might last a week or two or three or four months. Most of the equipment, we managed to get out of there but all the equipment was in pretty bad shape.

DW: Why and how did El Salvadoreans become involved in the Film Institute?

LS: I think it's easier to get the answer if we know the Salvadoreans, their culture and their behavior and their history. For instance, poetry is a big thing in El Salvador. They love poetry. They love the arts. They love to express themselves in those terms. And filming is another way of expressing those feelings. I met a great number of poets, writers, artists in general, they love film, they love filmmaking, they want to do it. And one of the great motivations that they have is that they have one of the most beautiful revolutions. So why not just write poetry, let's make films about it too. That's their language, their expression. They want to express themselves through film. Why not? Why not let them? Why not help them? They do need help. If only you have a piece of paper, you can write poetry and mail it to the North Americans for their appreciation. That is not going to require an awful lot of technical help. But if you want to make films, that's a whole different story. The world capital of films is right here in Los Angeles. So, why not come over here for help? In return, we might present a Salvadorean expression, interpretation, of the armed struggle that might be something very beautiful. And the product of that, once you first get in touch with this media, may not be the most sophisticated in technical terms, may not be the most beautiful in visual terms, the best sound etc. because it is not an easy media. It involves an awful lot of technicalities and knowledge. Yet the talent, motivation is there. And the subject justifies all this effort.

DW: Why did these particular people get involved in wanting to do films about the struggle there? What was in their own background or interests?

LS: People who get involved are from different walks of life, different economic and social classes and in order to qualify to do so, first of all you must understand a revolutionary process. Sympathize with it, and demonstrate willingness and capacity to work. We would not be realistic to stick only to people who already know a lot about filmmaking. So there is a need to train *compañeros* who demonstrate an interest or capacity to do that. One of the guys who wanted to become involved in filmmaking came from a *campesino* family. So he had a very

authentic point of view. All we had to do was to overcome certain lack of technical information. There is no great mystery of filmmaking. Other people had a background in theatre. This individual had been previously exposed to the work of a film crew which had been there before us, so he had a pretty good idea of how things are done. And the interesting thing is that different people from different backgrounds had one thing in common which was willingness to work on film, contributing to the revolution by doing so.

There were also people who came from the university. There was one guy who had seen a film crew before working in El Salvador, and he really wanted to do that, he wanted to learn, he participated in other film crews before and he liked to get involved with filmmaking. And he had a very good basic idea of it ... So this very film crew, even though they never shot a film together before, had an incredible responsibility on their shoulders in an extreme situation. Throughout the eleven months the motivation was always there. The sense of responsibility was always there. Food or no food. Bombings, mortars, landmines, etc., the motivation remained and finally we got the film out and finally we got it processed. So it's a great mission accomplished.

DW: You talked about some of these films being prepared mostly for North American audiences. But are these also films shown in El Salvador in the zones of control, and how do you think they affect people's perception of the war, people's perception of their own struggle?

LS: That's very important to show films to people who are in the films, the people that are filmed. They always want to see themselves. Most of the people never saw film before. As a matter of fact, there is a scene in the previous film which shows the reaction of people once they've seen a film. And that is an endless pleasure to show a film to people over there. The reactions are very difficult to describe. It's very difficult to do so. You cannot carry a screen around. You have to find a house that is still standing up and project on a wall. It's hard to get a generator to run a projector and the projector won't last too long. The film will deteriorate rapidly.

Several films have been shown to the civilian population in the zones of popular control. So it's a very positive reaction. Now as far as showing it, to have a widespread distribution in the capital, San Salvador, and so on and so forth, it would be totally impossible to show one of those films in a regular theatre in San Salvador for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, there are alternatives, which is to transfer films to video and distribute them. This is in the works.

DW: And this would be both in the zones of popular control and also in the urban areas?

LS: Mostly in the urban areas, because the idea would be to show this film to the largest number of people possible, whether on film or on video. It depends on the circumstances, the local circumstances. It's very common for people to have a VCR at home in San Salvador, and they have a whole bunch of video rental houses all over the place. It's amazing ... the home video thing is big in Latin America. The interesting thing is that most of it is in Beta instead of VHS, which is the most common form here.

DW: When people see the films they are excited about seeing themselves and

people they know. But in some ways, does seeing the film also help change or develop how they perceive the revolution as a whole and how they perceive their participation in the revolution, their relationship to it?

LS: Very much so. It brings in more cohesion and a greater sense of participation. I remember days in which battle scenes were shown to combatants and that increased, even more, their motivation. People from other areas would come in to watch a film, and that particular film had scenes of production in some parts of the zones of control. So people in other areas would get a pretty good idea about what was going on in other parts of the country. Again, we're talking of mass communication applied under difficult circumstances. It's a very small country, very densely populated. Yet due to the war situation, communications are not that easy. Sometimes you don't know what's happening at the other end of the country and to get a video or film that shows that lets people know that compañeros in other parts of the country are struggling as much as they are. And it creates more unity, a greater sense of cohesion.

DW: What about covering life from the point of view of women? Of what happens to women in a revolution. In your film you cover the daily life of women ... making tortillas, cooking, caring for children. But are you also touching on how the revolution has changed the lives of women, of how women enter the revolutionary struggle? How it has begun to change relationships between men and women and within the communities.

LS: We did not cover all of those things specifically. It's a very short, unpretentious film and it's impossible to cover all aspects of life over there. Yet, something becomes clear, which is that even though women did not abandon the tasks that were once exclusive to women, they maintain those activities, but on top of that they do participate in aspects of life that they did not before. Decision-making process, collective decision-making process, made by groups of women in the zones of popular control. The person who welcomed Gus Newport, Maria Serrano, was the leader of the local popular government. Traditionally in Salvadorean politics, and politics in general in Latin America more specifically, women were pretty much left out. It all boils down to the fact that everything we learn in theory or read or, ideally, thought about, is being done in practice over there at this point. And the women's issue is just one more aspect that is being put in practice.

DW: You mentioned that you wanted to form a crew to teach women how to make film and to become involved in filmmaking in El Salvador. What sort of films do you envision that crew making?

LS: I myself don't envision the films. I think that one could try to make a film or video or anything that would portray the role of women but I don't think it could be done better than if women do it themselves. So when I talk about training a film crew made up of women, I'm talking about the concepts, the basic concepts of filmmaking, technical, empirical ... film sense, film form, editing and camera operating, lighting and so on and so forth ... writing and discussing the basic ideas. And that's as far as it would go. From then on, it would be totally their responsibility to imprint their point of view upon their work.

DW: Have you talked with some of the women who might be involved about the kind of films they would like to make?

LS: In the zones of popular control, as far as women's liberation and women's roles are concerned, it's like a totally different universe than traditional Salvadorean society, the pre-revolutionary society. In the liberated areas women do what they do because they had to conquer, step by step, their positions, their position they are in now. So what we see over there is not women's liberation *per se*, it's people's liberation as everybody goes toward total liberation. It's kind of a natural thing that women are a great part of that, so it's not anything separate, you can't conceive women's liberation without men's liberation without children's liberation, total liberation. So there is a lot of unity. One thing that was strikingly apparent, obvious, was that the treatment given to women by the *compañeros* was completely different than what you see in other parts of the country that aren't liberated yet. So it's obvious women conquered a position that does not exist out of the revolutionary areas, the revolutionary environment.

DW: And that would be in the films, too?

LS: We didn't go specifically for that, but it is reflected in the film. It's quite obvious. At this point, up to now, the orientation of the Film Institute of El Salvador, basically, is to make possible the filming and the recording of video or whatever of the war, of the revolutionary process. In order to do so, ideally, we would have to create a certain number of film crews, not just one, which would be constantly shooting, constantly recording on video, super-8, 16mm, whatever, footage that would reflect the progress of the revolution. At this point that is the main concern rather than becoming a producing company.

DW: What are some of the future projects that are planned?

LS: The projects will be dictated by the necessities of the revolution. They are putting together a list of priorities. It's very nice to be talking about more films, yet the harsh realities and priorities are medicine for the people, food for the children, shoes, and things like that. I felt awkward when I was holding a very expensive still camera in my hands and I was around children who didn't eat the day before and were not going to eat the next day and they were barefoot and in the need of medicine. So we can talk about future projects, but we must keep in perspective that it is a war, that the civilian population is being bombed, is being relocated, is being massacred, and the priorities as far as film and video are concerned is to record those realities.

DW: Does the Film Institute have certain priorities, certain goals, certain ideas for films, films they feel should be made for the North American audience?

LS: We would like to hear from North Americans what it is that they want. There is a constant contact with the North Americans, a constant dialogue. Sometimes this dialogue is not totally rewarding or it's interrupted because, again, there is a war going on, so those are not ideal communication conditions. Sometimes things take much longer than we would like them to take. Sometimes we run into frustrating situations. But if we keep in perspective that it is an ugly war against the armed people going on, then we accept that and we understand that. I just want to add that the revolutionary process is already irreversible at this point. It is not a question of if, it is a question of when and at what cost. So filmmaking comes as an accessory, not as a priority.

There are ideas being formulated based on necessities, based on research, and without being overly optimistic I can tell you that more films are going to be made by North Americans, by internationalists, by Salvadoreans, and more help is going to be supplied to us, and more footage will be supplied by us. And I'm pretty sure that some of the projects that are being thought right now one day will become reality with the help and participation of North American organizations in solidarity.

NOTE

From *Jump Cut* no. 34

We printed Devra Weber's interview with Lino of the Film Institute of El Salvador in JUMP CUT, No. 33, without mentioning the important fact that the Institute ceased to exist after the end of 1986. It was replaced by the Unidad de Cine y TV de El Salvador, a unified media organization for the FMLN-FDR. Any one wanting more information about this organization should contact the El Salvador Media Project, 335 West 38th Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY, 10018, (212) 7149118. We hope to carry an article about the Unidad in a future issue.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

K.A. Abbas (1914-1987)

by Carol J. Slingo

from *Jump Cut*, no. 33, Feb. 1988, p. 99

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Khwaja Ahmed Abbas died on June 1, 1987 after 41 years as the most prominent voice of the left in Indian commercial films. While other political filmmakers addressed their work to educated viewers, he spent his life trying to reach the mass, more or less uneducated, audience of millions. To this end, he incorporated songs and dances, last minute rescues, character types, and other ingredients of Hindi popular cinema. But he subverted the plot devices that required raped women to commit suicide and wronged heroes to kill or die for useless reasons, and junked the usual cathartic, ritual denouement in favor of a just, socialist view of the future.

Politically, Abbas was part of a generation who were cultured in socialist and communist thought and organizations, and who had to make sense of the vast changes taking place in their own lifetime, most dramatically focused before, during and after national independence. In the cinema he was part of a generation of song and scriptwriters who came from the area which later became Pakistan and who had much influence in 1950s Indian cinema, though they were never an organized movement. Like many Communist Party and other left participants in the Indian film industry, Abbas made commercial films and consciously brought in progressive politics.

Only one of his 14 films was an important hit in India; most were financial failures. Still he worked doggedly, and as he grew older, he became an institution. A friend wrote,

"Abbas had always been a poor man who could not afford the luxury of contemporary filmmaking nor did he like it. Yet, he was always considered to be a successful filmmaker."(1)

The director once commented,

"Some people say I am mulish in trying out themes of social realism, without compromise. 'Give the people what they want,' they advise. But I believe in doing what satisfies not only my personal ego but my social conscience. I have no martyr complex. I have enjoyed making each one of my films."

Now that Indian video stores have followed Indian families to North America, even into the suburbs of Chicago, it is possible to see the idiosyncratic, nagging, and

generous work of K.A. Abbas.

Abbas, born into a Muslim family of Panipat, graduated from the University of Aligarh. Throughout his adult life he supported himself as a journalist and as a writer for a range of Hindi films from Raj Kapoor's socially incisive *AWARRA* (Vagabond, 1951) and *SHREE 420* (Mr. 420, 1955) to the fluffy *LOVE IN GOA* (1983), while his weekly column in *Blitz* magazine and over 70 books made him a name, a gadfly, a public figure. His work in Russian translation was adapted for the screen and honored by a major literary award. He became a cultural ambassador between the Indian and the Soviet film industries, eventually making a Russian-Hindi co-production, *PARDESI* (Traveller, 1957), which failed in his own country, he thought, because the love of an Indian woman for a foreigner was not acceptable to Indians.

Abbas directed his debut film *DHARTI KE LAL* (Sons of Earth) with actors of the Indian People's Theatre Association playing farmers struggling to survive the Bengal famine of 1943. George Sadoul wrote:

"Though often melodramatic, it is memorable for its depiction of the striking contrast between the poverty of the peasants and the luxury in which some Indians continued to live during the famine."(2)

"It was released ... in one theatre in Bombay," Abbas said, "and on the same day the communal riots started [Hindu-Moslem caste conflicts]. Our first show was full, all the shows were fully booked ... The second show never got started..."(3) An attempt to revive it was a failure; after Independence, audiences demanded light entertainment.

Abbas worked for five years to pay off his debts, and when he began his second feature, he combined social realism with stars. But by 1959 it was clear that this strategy was not financially sound when the actors of *CHAAR DIL CHAAR RAHEN* (Four Hearts, Four Roads) went to court for immediate payment. "They said probably this man will run away," explained Abbas.[4] *CHAAR DIL* was in fact headed for box office disaster. Abbas made heroes of stock support characters (the Untouchable, the Prostitute, the Hotel Waiter). Fans for superstars Raj Kapoor and actress Meena Kumari were not ready for this, never mind that the songs were catchy, the story gripping. Abbas was worn out. He began to cast his films with unknown artists exclusively. He had one big money maker, *SHEHAR AUR SAPNA* (The City and the Dream), which won a National Award, but because it had no stars, it, like his other films of the 1960s, is not in the video stores.

Amitabh Bachchan, on top of the box office for over a decade, made his debut with Abbas. The patriotic melodrama *SAAT HINDUSTANI* (Seven Indians, 1969) is thus available here in a subtitled version. As usual, sure-fire box office material — escapes, torture, fights — is blended into a plot that is part *FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS* (such borrowing is common in Bombay films), part history (a team of guerrillas is sent to destabilize Goa in advance of the Indian troops) and part plea for national unity. The anti-Portuguese scenes are subordinate to the conflicts between religious and linguistic factions that raged in the late 1960s. Abbas deliberately cast all the actors against region and religion: Malayalee actor for Bengali character, Muslim actors for Christians and Hindus, and Bachchan, the son of a noted Hindu poet, as the greenhorn Muslim who gets no respect until he has

proven himself many times.

In 1972 Abbas completed DO BOOND PANT (Two Drops of Water), in which the traditional desert people of Rajasthan help to build an immense irrigation system. "It is a privilege for the Indian cinema to be the chronicler of this great and historic, dramatic and exciting, transformation," Abbas wrote in "Social Realism in the Indian Cinema" (*Filmfare*, June 2, 1972). With formidable settings, inspirational melodrama, and a magisterial score by Jaidev, DO BOOND PANI may be the most important of his later films. It, too, was a box office flop.

FAASLA (Distance, 1974) was far less costly, a simple tale of a playboy sent to an asylum when he changes his life and sides with his workers. Shabana Azmi, who has been seen in the West in films of Shyam Benegal and Mrinal Sen, made her debut as the hero's supporter and lover. (It should be noted that women's roles run from the decorative to dismal in most Hindi films. Abbas wrote strong, positive women's roles.) THE NAXALITES (1981) is an anecdotal history of a Marxist-Leninist movement in parts of India. Scenes of graphic bloodshed alternate with the domestic lives of militants and tribal ethnography. It was considered within the industry to be a bizarre failure. MR. X combined actors of New Cinema, low budget special effects, animals, and James Bond material with questions about science.

Abbas' health began to fail in the 60s, when he suffered his first heart attack. Later he had a more serious attack and a mild paralytic stroke. He also had cataracts and an accident in which a camera trolley injured his legs; nevertheless, he found money to make EK AADMI (One Man), and went on working until his death. However he may have felt about the rejection of his work by its intended mass audience, he nevertheless wrote in one of his final columns for *Blitz*: "...see any of the pictures I produced — and you will meet me."

NOTES

1. S. Ghosh, "K. A. Abbas: A Man in Tune with History," *Screen* (Bombay), June 19, 1987, p. 14.

2. *Dictionary of Films* (Berkeley: U. of CA Press, 1977), p. 84.

3. This quote and the next from a lengthy interview with Abbas in Vasudev and Lenglet, eds., *Indian Cinema Super-bazaar* (New Dehli: Vikas, 1978).

4. Of all the Abbas films I have watched on videocassette, only two had English subtitles. These were SAAT HINDUSTANI and ACHANAK (Suddenly, 1973), directed by Gulzar, which is an atypical story of a soldier who handles his private life as an extension of war and is hanged for the murder of his wife. It should not be difficult to rent Hindi films from any established store. Many groceries carry prints behind the counter, even if they are not advertised, and in cities with large Indian populations, there will probably be several stores that rent by mail to people with established accounts. The quality of the prints and tapes will vary beyond belief.

The Mission, Junipero Serra, and the politics of sainthood

by Mark I. Pinsky

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When Pope John Paul II pronounces Father Junipero Serra "beatified," the second of three required steps to sainthood, next year in Rome, backers of the "Apostle of California" might say a little prayer of thanksgiving for the heroic Jesuit missionaries depicted in the film *THE MISSION* — for making the festivities possible.

The workings of the Catholic Church and the nature of sainthood have figured in a number of feature films shot around the world and shown in this country over the past several years: *THE NAME OF THE ROSE* (Italy and Germany), *THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO VIC* (Scotland) and *THERESE* (France), as well as a documentary on the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

THE MISSION

None, however, focused on the moral dilemmas associated with sanctity and the state as much as *THE MISSION*, which deals with some of the Jesuit missionaries who went to live among the Guarani Indians of Latin America in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Jesuits founded successful, cooperative agricultural settlements, called *reducciones*, in the jungle highlands near the modern border of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. For nearly two centuries they brought Christianity to the native peoples and defended them from the depredations of Spanish and Portuguese colonists. Ultimately, the geopolitics of the day put them and their order at odds with the Pope, and they had to decide whose law God would have them obey, whether to save their lives or their souls.

THE MISSION won the grand prize at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival, a Christopher Award, a Gold Angel from the Los Angeles-based Religion in Media, two Golden Globes (best screenplay and musical score) and an Academy Award (for Chris Menges' cinematography). However, at the box office and for many viewers, the film was a disappointment.

Some critics found the \$17 million film too long and sections of the dialogue "preachy." Others complained that the production's whole was less than the sum of its formidable parts: actors Jeremy Irons and Robert DeNiro; screenwriter Robert Bolt (*A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS*); composer Ennio Morricone; director Roland

Joffe and producer David Puttnam (who collaborated on *THE KILLING FIELDS*), deposed head of Columbia Pictures. The project was largely the result of a ten-year effort by the Italian producer Fernando Ghia, ultimately the film's co-producer, who has worked on such political films as *THE MATTEI AFFAIR* and *CHINA IS NEAR*.

Regardless of its mass entertainment value, *THE MISSION* raised important questions relevant to the Serra sainthood campaign, in part because the histories of the Jesuits and Serra's Franciscans in the New World have been intertwined for more than two centuries, beginning with the events portrayed in the movie.

In 1759, three years after *THE MISSION*'s Jesuits gave their lives defending the land and culture of the Guarani Indians — sacrificed by church leaders trying to preserve the black-robed order's existence — Portugal nevertheless expelled the Jesuits from all of its territories in the New World, making the colonies once again safe for slavery and slaughter of the Indians.

Eight years later the other shoe dropped, when King Carlos III of Spain, convinced that rebellious, intriguing Jesuits were involved in an assassination plot against him, booted the order from all of its American colonies, and gave the missionaries 30 days to vacate their California territory — on pain of death if they refused or tarried. During the next half century, the order was suppressed and nearly died.

FRANCISCANS TAKE OVER

The principal beneficiaries of the Jesuits' expulsion were the Spanish Franciscans, who first arrived in Mexico in 1524. Serra, accompanied by Spanish military and civil authorities, personally took over the California territory from the Jesuits in 1769. He went on to found the string of missions that runs from San Diego to San Francisco. In sharp contrast to *THE MISSION*'s young Jesuits, who were killed by Spanish and Portuguese soldiers, Serra died peacefully in his sleep in 1784 at the age of 71, surrounded by a few Indian converts at Mission San Carlos Borromeo in Carmel.

Over the last 50 years, wide and powerful support has been generated in California particularly in conservative political circles — and the world for Serra's cause, as the sainthood drive is known. There are statues and stamps in his image and streets named in his honor, and he has been the subject of countless books and articles and several wholly uncritical documentaries and docudramas.

INDIAN ACTIVISTS OPPOSE BEATIFICATION

Yet throughout his tenure as president of California missions and since, Serra has been charged with cruelty and insensitivity toward the Indians. Indian activists opposed to Serra's beatification demonstrated near the Carmel Mission late September during John Paul II's U.S. visit, when the Pope delivered a panegyric over Serra's grave, but did not announce the beatification, as widely expected. John Paul has in his travels exhibited considerable sensitivity to the customs and concerns of native peoples, and he continues to do so. Before coming to Carmel, he spoke to 15,000 Native American Catholics in Phoenix — where he apologized for the treatment of Indians by some missionaries, but praised Serra as an individual by finessing the historical record — and after Carmel, he kept his promise to

reschedule another meeting with Native Americans in Western Canada. While visiting Temuco, Chile, in April of 1987, the Pope told the Mapuche Indians who had gathered at the rally that he had come "to encourage the Mapuches to conserve with a healthy pride the culture of their people; the traditions and customs, the language and their own values."

In response to the Indians' charges against Serra, the Diocese of Monterey hired a public relations specialist to compile an historical defense of Serra's relations with Indian converts, and has issued a challenge to all who oppose beatification on those grounds to come forward. The American Indian Historical Society in San Francisco accepted the challenge, and released its own critical book-length reply to the diocese, entitled "Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide."

A LEGACY OF GENOCIDE

It was troubling to Serra's supporters that some Catholics want to measure the Franciscan missionary against the standard set by the Jesuits of THE MISSION. Such a comparison would be academic, inasmuch as the Jesuits who died above the spectacular Iguazu falls defied the church as well as the Portuguese and the Spanish — and, having been excommunicated, are not considered martyrs to the faith, much less candidates for sainthood. The comparison also raises questions about the nature of sanctity and its relation — if any — to discipline and obedience.

While Serra, a former theology professor and member of the Inquisition, traveled with Spanish civil and military authorities, and frankly paved the way for Spanish empire, the priests of THE MISSION demonstrated what one character in the film, a cardinal played by Ray McAnally, calls "Jesuit contempt for the authority of the state."

Unlike the Guarani of Latin America, most California Indians of the period were peaceful and pastoral to the point of passivity. Nonetheless, the Franciscans thought their hunter-gatherer society was uncivilized, chiefly because the California natives of the time permitted abortion and divorce, were promiscuous (i.e., they remarried after divorce), failed to discipline their children, bathed in sweat lodges and worshipped the forces of nature.

After luring the Indians into the mission settlements with everything from trinkets and musical instruments to a regular and reliable food supply, the Indian converts were compelled to build the structures and grow crops to feed themselves, the priests, colonists, soldiers and civil authorities. Within the completed missions, the Indians — even those who were married — were lodged separately by sex, in close, poorly ventilated quarters. Exposed to European diseases for the first time under such conditions, they died in horrendous numbers.

Those who ran away were rounded up with the help of Spanish soldiers, punished, and forcibly returned, sometimes in chains. When discipline was required, the Indians were shipped or beaten, as Serra and his defenders have acknowledged, pointing out that it was a common practice in those days — a practice to which the priests voluntarily submitted themselves as penance.

This is a virtual mirror image to the thriving communities, sometimes called "republics," portrayed in THE MISSION. True, as the film progresses, more

clothing is worn by the Guarani, but there is no coercion or corporal punishment in evidence. As they did a hundred years before in Canada, the Jesuits speak and pray in the Indian language, rather than compelling them to learn Spanish, which was the rule in California.

It was precisely this economic success which doomed THE MISSION's Indian settlements since, as McAnally, who portrays the Pope's representative observes, "the paradise of the poor never pleases those who rule above them." And, at least in part as a result of their contact with the Jesuits, the Guarani ended up just as dead and bonded as the Chumash of California.

DEBATE OVER INDIAN CULTURE

The differences between Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries in North and South America was symptomatic of a larger dispute. At issue was whether, as Serra believed, it was first necessary to suppress aspects of indigenous, non-Christian cultures in order to evangelize them — a position largely reversed by the Second Vatican Council — a matter of vigorous controversy within the church in the 18th century and well before, most notably in the Chinese Rites Controversy.

"These were huge debates that involved great Spanish theologians on the whole issue of using force for conversion," said Father John A. Coleman, a professor of religion and society at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. In judging historical figures, Coleman said, the common expression in explaining their actions is that "they breathed the air of their time." But the problem with Serra is that there was other air to be breathed. If you're looking backward, you can fairly hold them to the best standards of their time. Coleman asked,

"Was a candidate for sainthood caught in the mentality of the age, or did he or she transcend the age? God's judgment calls on us to stand above our time."

Father Francis Guest, a Franciscan historian, told an interviewer recently that Serra's treatment of the Indians "has to be judged in light of European culture in the 18th century. It's not appropriate to use the standards of today in judging people." The Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which declared the validity of a miraculous cure attributed to Serra's intercession, evidently concurred. "The good that Serra did for the Indians far outweighed any of what we might now consider negative elements," says Msgr. Robert Sarno, an American priest assigned to the Congregation in Rome, "namely, blending them into the Spanish culture, as well as protecting them from Spanish soldiers and settlers."

"There is a prophetic side of sanctity," countered Dorothy H. Donnelly, a theological historian and associate member of the sisters of St. Joseph, "a gift of breaking through your time, your culture and your century, and of saying 'no' to the surrounding culture," as did the Jesuits of THE MISSION.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The Serra beatification highlights the issue of what kind of message the Church wants to send today to the world, especially the Third World, where the church would like to strengthen its hand. One Southern California priest has referred to the Majorca-born Serra as an "affirmative action saint," offered to a church that, in

the Sunbelt at least, is becoming increasingly Latino. In downtown Los Angeles and other urban centers THE MISSION was shown with Spanish subtitles.

And while the debate over evangelizing people in the Third World may be settled, the related matter of obedience is not. Father Daniel Berrigan, a rather rebellious Jesuit who has said "no" many times to the powers that be of this culture, and who plays a bit part in the film, suggested in American Film that there is a direct line between the Jesuit *reducciones* portrayed in THE MISSION, and the "Christian base communities" now being created among the poor by some priests in Latin America.

Others make the connection between priests who cast off the cloth and became revolutionary guerrillas in the 1960s, as well as the more moderate adherents of "liberation theology," which has been criticized by the Pope. Joffe recently told the *Los Angeles Times* that while filming the picture, "I became fascinated with liberation theology." Several members of the ruling Sandinista directorate in Nicaragua are former priests, and were publicly chided by the Pope during his 1986 visit to Managua.

Those clerics like Berrigan and his brother Phillip, a former Jesuit, who ally themselves with the poor and politically dispossessed and against the established order continue to run into trouble, as evidenced by last winter's meeting of U.S. bishops in Washington, which backed the Vatican in temporarily disciplining Seattle Bishop Raymond G. Hunthausen. Two American Jesuit priests have been forced from their order in the past year because of teachings and acts alleged to be at odds with dogma, especially in the area of sexuality. For a brief period, the Pope personally appointed the order's governing Superior General in Rome, an unprecedented break in the Jesuits' history of electing their own leader.

Addressing a crowd at Corrientes, Argentina, the Pope John Paul paid a kind of backhanded (and inaccurate) tribute to the Jesuits of THE MISSION, saying, "the missions and doctrines of the Jesuits constitute, without a doubt, one of the most worthwhile achievements that unified the Spanish, Portuguese and native worlds." In the audience were many Indians, who hold an annual procession for the Virgin Mary, whom they call "the Queen of the Guaranis."

There is evidence, apart from the Serra beatification, that that the commitment displayed by the Jesuits in THE MISSION does have a place in the sainthood process. Supporters of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was gunned down by a right-wing death squad in El Salvador because of his opposition to the authoritarian regime then in power — an incident roughly recreated in the film SALVADOR — are now asking Rome to declare him "venerable," the first of the three steps to sainthood.

Television: a new weapon for the new imperialist war

by Samuel Brody

from *Jump Cut*, no. 33, Feb. 1988, pp. 105-106

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Special Section: Film and Photo League

— Sarah Miller

We are sad to announce the death of Sam Brody on September 9, 1987, at the age of 80. Brody was one of the founders of the Workers Film and Photo League. His documentary film work and writings continue to interest and inspire us. He helped to produce many films for organized labor and some of his early still photographs and films were of important strikes of the day: the 1926 textile strike in Passaic, NJ and the 1929 strike in Gastonia, NC. He was a cameraperson for the F&PL at the 1931 and 1932 hunger marches on Washington, DC.

The four articles which follow include two pieces by Brody and two reviews of books covering the League and its participants. For an extensive treatment of the League, see the entire section on "Radical Cinema in the 30's: Film and Photo League" in JUMP CUT, No. 14 (\$2.00 U.S., \$2.50 foreign), which includes an interview with Sam Brody and two more articles by him.

We are very grateful to Leo Seltzer, also one of the founders of the League, who generously supplied most of the illustrations for this special section. He still sells, distributes and goes out speaking with several of the League's films. For more info, write him at 368 E. 69th St. NYC, 10021.

Television: a new weapon for the new imperialist war by Samuel Brody

*We are reprinting below an incredibly prophetic article on television
Brody wrote for **The Daily Worker** June 14, 1930. — eds.*

Television is now a fact. Like all great inventions born amidst the chaos and isolation of scientific research in capitalist society, it came like a bolt from the sky, with all the padded atmosphere of "magic" and "wizardry" that ushered in the telephone, the phonograph, and the radio.

To the working masses these inventions come indeed like miracles born of wizards' brains. The wide gap which divides them from the monopolized realms of science and art is glaringly obvious here and is the result of an ever more defined division of labor in society with a class "top" and "bottom."

The Sunday magazine sections of every capitalist paper carry loud and boisterous articles on the "blessings of our modern life" with all the marvels of science at the reach of the humblest of Americans. Think of it, television in your own home!

In the United States, too, the "means of mental production" are the monopoly of the ruling class. Anarchy in the sphere of science is an extension of the disorganization and chaos inherent in capitalist economy.

The sound film came along one day, coached and fed by the late Sam Warner. Thus a whole industry was thrown out of joint. Today there are some ninety-four different patented sound systems. The same is true of the color film and also of a much simpler innovation, wide film.

And so with television. Hollywood is already hysterical. Soon its "big bosses" — the former haberdashers, wholesale cloth-spongers and store-keepers — will be tearing at each other's throats. Already they have put their feet in the new field. But the air has long ago been monopolized by the giants: A.T.T., R.C.A., Western Electric and General Electric. In the next two years we will witness the complete merging of these engineering trusts with the financial powers of the screen. By the very nature of television the motion picture barons will be at a disadvantage in all this.

And just as today you are able to listen to Will Rogers under the auspices of Squibbs Dental Cream, so tomorrow you will have the possibility of both seeing and hearing Greta Garbo or Rowdie Vallup under the auspices of the Kwiktie Shoelace Corporation.

The glorious wedding of art, sciences and advertising.

A Wall Street synthesis.

But what is the more serious aspect in the coming of this mighty photo-electric eye?

Not an invention is made — even a minor one — but that its adaptability to war is immediately considered and perfected. This is especially true in this period of frantic preparation for the impending explosion. In a previous article we have shown how the sound film is exploited to perfect the war machine. In the case of television this is even more the case.

The same day that the enlarged television projector was demonstrated in the laboratories of the General Electric Co. at Schenectady, Dr. E.F.W. Alexanderson, its inventor, said to the assembled newspapermen:

"What will this mean in the war of the future, when a staff officer can see the enemy through the television eyes of his scouting planes, or when they can send a bombing plane without a man on board, which can see the target and be steered by radio up to the moment when it hits?"

Dr. Alexanderson, with all the perspicacity of his specialized brain, visualizes another valuable aspect of his device:

"Television will be a great asset to politicians. The day is likely to come when candidates for president of the United States will campaign on television."

A supreme propaganda method for bringing capitalist propaganda into the worker's home.

A weapon superior to the newspaper, more effective than the film, more effective than the radio!

Such is science in the hands of militant American imperialism.

Television broadcasting will be of two kinds. Motion pictures will be broadcast from master film prints with synchronized sound and talk and "real" events will be transmitted through the medium of radio cameras.

The first method will correspond to the so-called entertainment film as we know it in the movies. The second process will amount to an infinite extension of the present sound newsreel or documentary film. This will be the medium which then as now will have the advantage of being most effective from the psychological standpoint. Its power lies in that its authenticity can never be questioned by the onlooker.

Comrade Leon Moussinac, no doubt the ablest living authority on motion picture theory, long ago established it as axiomatic that "in the motion picture the feeling of reality is indispensable for the creation of emotion." [1] This "feeling of reality" is the very essence of picture facts, as the Soviet director, Vertov, calls filmed documents. In this respect the film created on the basis of an artificial scenario is infinitely inferior to powerful documents like TURKSIB, SHANGHAI DOCUMENT or the average newsreel.

Another advantage of the documentary film as a propagator of ideas is its extreme flexibility. The television camera will lend itself to the same authentic lies as the motion picture camera.

In 1924, during a public discussion in Moscow, Dziga Vertov revealed an heretofore unpublished statement by Lenin urging the complete transformation of Soviet Russia's motion picture repertoire on the basis of the documentary of "unplayed" film. What would Lenin have said about television, he who considered the movies "the art which for us is the most important."

Technology has given the answer to the long-standing controversy of fact versus fiction in the movies. Television has uncanned the film. Television has rendered the acted film amateurish and backward.

In the Soviet Union such an invention would be used to raise the cultural level of the workers and peasants. It would be applied for the advancement and true progress of the formerly oppressed national minorities. For that same purpose they are now using the movies and the radio at the present time.

There television will be used to help build socialism and a better world for the laboring masses.

Here it will be used for "entertainment" and for bombing planes; for commercial advertising and for capitalist politicians.

NOTES

1. *Birth of the Movies*. Paris, 1925.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Looking back

by Peter Bates

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Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States 1930-1942, by Russell Campbell, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1982. \$44.95

Film on the Left: American Documentary Film from 1931 to 1942, by William Alexander, Princeton University Press, 1981. \$12.50

Filmfront, a reprint edition annotated by Anthony Slide, introduction by David Platt, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1986. \$16.50

New Theatre and Film, selections edited with commentary by Herbert Cline. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, CA, 1985. \$13.95

1934 marked more than the passing of Jack Benny's 39th year — it was a pivotal year in the history of film politics. In the fifth year of the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt, prodded by the Catholic Legion of Decency, instituted the Production Code Administration Office, requiring all members of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America to run their films by the board to get certification. Coincidentally, the Production Code endorsed films like NO GREATER GLORY and [THE] FIRST WORLD WAR, "two of the most inflammatory war-propaganda films of the year (David Platt, *Filmfront*, Vol. One, Number 2)." 1934 was also a year of barbed contrasts, a time when Eisenstein's QUE VIVA MEXICO was sliced up and then shelved by producer Sol Lesser, while Mussolini's MAN OF COURAGE saw release in New York City.

THE WORKER'S FILM AND PHOTO LEAGUE

In 1934, *New Theatre* magazine (later appended to *New Theatre and Film*) began offering readers fairly sophisticated political analyses of the arts, generally unencumbered by a hard "party line." The three-year old Worker's Film and Photo League (WFPL) held successful boycotts against militarist feature films that "aided the Roosevelt administration's recruiting drive (Campbell, page 49)." The League picketed over 20 theaters showing Columbia's NO GREATER GLORY and, in the case of the pro-Nazi film S.A. MANN BRAND, actually closed the film down. In the same year, the New York branch of the WFPL produced WORKERS ON THE WATERFRONT, a fifteen minute short that portrayed the conditions of longshoremen, as well as suggesting strike action to overcome them —

quintessential agitprop. A critic reviewing *WORKERS ON THE WATERFRONT* in *Filmfront*, the League's short-lived organ, said,

"In a documentary film the skeptics have no opportunity to cry 'propaganda' because the factual evidence is laid before them. It cannot be denied."

By 1934, the New York-based League had regional branches in Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. They filmed demonstrations, documented Tom Mooney's trial and the Hillsboro case, and in general, undertook short (under 30 minutes) films to expose harsh living conditions in cities and farm valleys.

Only nine films survive. Many more were planned that never got off the ground. By late 1934, widespread dissatisfaction in the League began to corrode the organization. Production slowed down and new theories arose about "dramatized documentary" and satire. One of the League's last productions, *SHERRIFFED*, was accused by a *New Masses* critic of having "almost every conceivable error of cinematography." By year's end, the League was a mere shadow of itself on the screen; some say it virtually dissolved shortly afterwards — or evolved. In September a splinter group led by Leo Hurwitz and Ralph Steiner formed Nykino, a fulltime production unit designed to produce a new style of film. By early 1935, *Filmfront* ceased publication after only five issues.

At its peak, the "first worker's film group in America (*Experimental Cinema*)" involved over 100 active members, not only producing documentary shorts, but spearheading boycott drives nationwide, holding classes in film production, campaigning against censorship of Soviet films, and writing articles for the left-wing press, like *New Theater and Film* and *Filmfront*. What were its theories of film production? Were they original, or just reflective of the Worker's International Relief (the Comintern's cultural wing) and the theories of Eisenstein and Vertov? How pervasive were their films? What effect did they have on the audiences who saw (and participated in) them? What were the League's shortcomings, its mistakes? And finally, do its experiences from the 30s speak to documentary filmmakers today?

FILMFRONT

Some of these questions can be answered immediately, for the League was certainly not secretive about its singular intents. The new reprint edition of *Filmfront*'s five issues provides a close-up of its activities, blasts Hollywood dangerous and silly films, issues calls to action, and even doles out self-criticism. First printed on mimeographed sheets, then photo offset for the last issue, *Filmfront* reached League members roughly every two weeks over a three month period. In the introduction, editor and FPL National Secretary David Platt speaks nostalgically about the influence of Pudovkin and Ermler on League members and the fights against "meretricious films" like *THE MERRY FRINKS* and *BLACK FURY*. Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us how articles were selected, how many copies were printed, how they were distributed, what editorial imbroglios occurred, nor, most importantly, did he give his view of why the League dissipated.

Despite the introduction's shortcomings, *Filmfront* does give a satisfying slice of the daily process behind 30s radical film and photographic activities. Makers of

SHERRIFFED get roundly criticized for producing a sloppy film in which "the facts are not presented dramatically enough." The writer then gives filmmaker Nancy Naumburg a chance to defend herself. "The camera was old and temperamental, jamming in the middle of important scenes, etc." A FPL affiliate, the Nature Friends Photo Group, describes their charming short — beginning with crowded street scenes and ending with a weekend at the NF camp in Midvale, NJ, and challenges the New York FPL to a photography contest. Cameraman Leo Seltzer edits a column called "Technically Speaking" in which he not only gives tips on steadying tripods, but suggests how long to pan placards while filming demonstrations.

The film reviews sprinkled throughout each issue are spunky, amusing, often spotty in quality. With critiques sometimes only a phrase long, columns like "The Movie Fan's Guide," "Hollywoodiana," and "Hollywood Spotlight" gave readers the lowdown on what to see or avoid (more often the latter). On FLIRTATION WALK: "Raise your son to be a soldier, lady. With music 'n romance." On MAN OF COURAGE: "About Muscle-ini. Now being reviewed by picket lines wherever shown." On THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN: "A great film about a great man by a great director." (Interestingly, a 1974 review about THE WAY WE WERE in the Daily World — "Not the way we remember it!" — shows how little CP snippet film criticism has changed.)

Who actually read *Filmfront*? These offhanded critiques of films like THE PRESIDENT VANISHES and DEVIL DOGS OF WAR, shortened for lack of space, suggests the audience included more than film aficionados and documentarians — perhaps CP and YCL members or party "sims" interested in taking in a weekend film, but with little time to read a lengthy analysis. Longer reviews did appear, often revealing damning facts about stars like Eddie Cantor, who supported censorship and visited Mussolini, "which left him pining for a similar form of fascism in his own country." Films are accused of "juggling reality" and giving distorted portraits of the working class. Reflecting pre-Popular Front ideology, the reviews sported unsophisticated theories on "progressive aspects of the film" or dealt — like Christopher Caudwell did — with the class implications of romantic love. *Filmfront*'s reviews gave its readers a solid, gut Marxist approach, with no ambivalence, film criticism for the front lines that missed no opportunity to slash at movies acting as Rooseveltian "war propaganda." Other movies were blasted for being escapist, anti-Semitic, pro-imperialist, harmless, sweet or gutless. The only ones that escaped calumny were Soviet productions like CHAPAYEV and some of the League's own documentaries.

If *Filmfront*'s writing was simplistic and slapdash, it is probably because its members — many of whom had fulltime jobs — had little time for theoretical work. Alexander mentions that David Platt abandoned a book — *Cinema and the New Naturalism* — because "the book succumbed to the Depression and to his commitment to socialism." Others spent time at League meetings planning new features or mounting boycott or letter-writing campaigns or simply hashing out mounting disputes over priorities. Campbell quotes Sidney Meyers, who claimed there were so many mass meetings and demonstrations to attend, he seldom had any time to shoot film or teach at the Harry Alan Potamkin Film school.

NEW THEATRE AND FILM

But if a League writer like Lewis Jacobs wanted to expound more deeply about a film, there was always *New Theatre and Film*, a fairly polished arts magazine, much like *New Masses*, but including more reviews of performance art than original creative work. A March 1936 review of Chaplin's MODERN TIMES takes him to task for confusion of content and form. Reading "Little Charlie, What Now?" strips away the quaint aura of this classic, because it dresses down Chaplin for not using sound more often, and for having his Little Tramp learn nothing from his misadventures. It's easy to forget the last two Tramp films were produced in the Thirties, and not earlier; perhaps the technology and tenor of the times had matured and Chaplin hadn't.

It's unclear what *New Theatre and Film*'s exact relation with the League was. Alexander says that at various times it "served as the League's official voice." A column called "The Movie Front" was filled with news about their activities. However, he mentions that *Filmfront* was "a breakaway from the more artistically oriented *New Theatre*." Leo Hurwitz, who together with Ralph Steiner split from the League to form Nykino, served as its editor. A pivotal article published in September 1935, "A New Approach to Filmmaking" by Hurwitz and Steiner, shows which direction two of the League's key documentarians were headed. They had taken a course by Lee Strasburg at the Theatre Collective school and learned how to work on viewer interest by constructing dramatic situations:

"We did not realize that the staging — the invention of activity and circumstances to recreate the scene in space and time — was a necessary step before a shooting script could be made."

In their books' opening chapters, both Alexander and Campbell trace the League's activities and detail organizational and work methods. Campbell follows the productions by year and region, giving plots and descriptions of films like STRIKE AGAINST STARVATION and BONUS MARCH. He quotes loquacious Leo Seltzer, the peripatetic cameraman who filmed many of the early documentaries:

"I got there just as the bonus marchers were being run out of Washington by MacArthur and the regular army, the cavalry and the tanks, and I filmed the whole area smouldering and burning, as I walked through it."

There was often considerable danger involved in obtaining dramatic footage. Sometimes they had to film surreptitiously, often they got into uncomfortable scrapes. Both Campbell and Alexander relate this episode: During a demonstration for the Scotsboro Boys, Seltzer, in the middle of filming a marcher whacking a cop with a placard stick, got thrown into a paddy wagon. Committed cameraman to the end, he continued filming through the door. Alexander, with his flair for anecdotes, tells how Seltzer once "improvised his screen in a vacant lot between the houses of the sheriff and deputy sheriff so that he could show the miners a film of their own picketing..."

Campbell tends to quote more from contemporary (and 19th century) theoretical sources than Alexander, detailing the ideological underpinnings of the League's theoreticians — like Samuel Brody, who, in opposition to Hurwitz, maintained that the starkness and unpretentiousness of the newsreel account are more dramatic than staged incidents of class warfare. In Campbell's introductory chapter, he

traces the history of social realism, quotes Vertov's Kino-Eye theories, then zeroes in on the theory of montage, "social realism's compromise with the twentieth century."

After a two-page discussion of the times, Alexander plunges right into the League's development, offering fairly competent capsule biographies of members that tell how they thought and what united them. He too talks of the associative montage in films like AMERICA TODAY:

"Taking two unrelated library newsreel shots and cutting them into three separate shots, Seltzer juxtaposed Roosevelt signing a document, a fleet going through war maneuvers, and Roosevelt looking up from the document with a self-satisfied smile."

He mentions the audience for these films only briefly, implying that the films, although convincing and dramatic, largely preached to the converted. The simplistic format of these films leads us to feel this is true.

AUDIENCE AND CENSORSHIP

But is it? He mentions in passing that CANNON OR TRACTORS drew an "arguable" total of 14,000 people, but doesn't ask his interviewees about working class audience reaction. Did the filmmakers ever ask people what they thought of the films? Did they take polls, or, more importantly, visit with interested viewers, put them on Fun front mailing lists? Did people's politics change markedly by viewing these films? The League offered "speakers for all aspects of the movie for your organization." Are there no records of what these "organizations" thought of the League, or even who they were? Campbell obliquely answers this question using a reverse barometer: censorship. If the Newark police denied 1,500 people entrance to the film, then yes, they did affect people in ways that displeased the riot-shy authorities.

As to why the League dwindled, both Campbell and Alexander supply similar reasons for its demise. For some, it was a matter of spreading themselves too thinly over a kaleidoscope of activism. Film production, or more precisely, raising money for film production, always seem to get pushed into the rearguard of priorities. Alexander mentions that after a sudden flurry of activity, often nothing happened for months. He also blames "the hard-line period of Communist Party activity in America," a time when members were expected to uncritically support decisions from above. For a while, most did submit to party discipline without question. Lewis Jacobs would hand over his footage to the League "with no explanation of what was to become of it." But obedience to the principles of democratic centralism was probably not as great a factor in League dissolution as was its resistance to artistic growth of the documentary medium.

In his "Breakaway: Nykino" chapter, Campbell states that Hurwitz and Steiner's Nykino group became the second stage of development — that a specialized, full-time "Shock Troupe" formed to produce dramatic documentaries that "assume the revolutionary approach, instead of convincing the spectator of their correctness" (Hurwitz). He quotes the Nykino filmmakers in great detail, pointing out the bitterness and rejection that occurred between them and League members.

As the radical labor movement entered its People's Front phase, Nykino's first production, *PIE IN THE SKY*, a satire that mocked religious belief in paradise, scared off leftwing critics wishing not to offend, such as the following: "The fierceness and baldness with which it ridicules the Church would prove antagonistic to an average working class audience." To their credit, both Alexander and Campbell take the CP to task for its unnatural phobia toward satire, a mistrust propped by the belief that the literal-minded working class will probably miss the point.

There were national and global reasons why a group like The Film and Photo League couldn't have continued along their path of left-wing newsreel production, reasons beyond technical and artistic development. Nationally, the Federal Government was snatching some of the best documentarians, most notably photographers like Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Internationally, socialist realism was changing and agitprop was becoming passé, no longer considered effective in moving "center forces" in the class struggle.

In Europe, left-wing cultural production was changing. Brecht was writing allegories and plays about distant historical events rather than the *lehrstucke* of *THE MEASURES TAKEN* and *KUHLE WAMPE*. After filming his Popular Front documentary *LA VIE EST A NOUS*, filmmaker Jean Renoir composed his Marxist version of the French Revolution, *LA MARSEILLAISE*; Buñel's social documentary period evolved from *LAND WITHOUT BREAD* to produce the unrelenting *LOS OLVIDADOS*. Even Eisenstein later joined the socio-historical trend with *ALEXANDER NEVSKY* and *IVAN THE TERRIBLE*. The U.S. radical intelligentsia may not have seen these works, but they were probably acquainted with them.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Campbell could have spent less time analyzing *PIE IN THE SKY* and more in digging deeper into the political trends influencing the international direction of documentaries. If he had done more contextual analysis like that in his first chapter, when he brilliantly analyzed the historical setting for montage's development, his richly detailed research may not have gotten tangled in the trees of exposition.

In his later chapters, Campbell continually points out that after the League, documentary filmmakers produced stunning and emotive work, as in *PEOPLE OF THE CUMBERLAND*. But ambitious sixty-minute productions involved compromises with the film's backers, the liberal wing of the anti-Fascist movement — often to the detriment of the film. *HEART OF SPAIN*, for example, never mentions socialism or even the Soviet Union's aid to the Loyalist forces in Spain.

It may be facile to imply that the Film and Photo League spawned Nykino, which later metamorphosed into Frontier Films, headed by a dedicated and talented core of artisans like Joris Ivens, Pare Lorentz, and Willard Van Dyke. It is possible to trace a ten-year line of development from *WORKERS ON THE WATERFRONT* to *NATIVE LAND*, pointing out thematic similarities along the way. And although commitment to social change continued and artistic standards improved, the workings of a mass arts organization with its own productions, publications, boycotts, anti-censorship and letter-writing campaigns may have passed forever

when the League disbanded.

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THIS ESSAY FROM FILM AND PHOTO LEAGUE MEMBERS

From *Jump Cut* no. 34

FILM AND PHOTO LEAGUE RESPONSES

Joris Ivens, David Platt, and Leo Seltzer all wrote in to say that they found Peter Bates' review in JUMP CUT, No. 33 of several recent books, which include discussions of the Film and Photo League, inaccurate and misleading. All of them were glad to see continued discussion of their work, but felt they needed to defend their personal memory of involvement in a moment which, in recent years, left critics, such as Russell Campbell and Willian Alexander, have subjected to scholarly evaluation.

We have synthesized here a list of their differences with Bates' review. We certainly regret any errors of fact, but must emphasize that we stand by the important scholarship that Campbell and Alexander have done, as well as Peter Bates account of it.

1. S.A. MANN BRAND was a German film the F&PL demonstrated against it as part of their antifascist work.
2. Bates refers to WORKERS ON THE WATERFRONT as "quintessential agitprop." Seltzer finds this a negative stereotype.
3. By "Hillsboro" Bates must mean the Scottsboro case.
4. Stating that only nine of the F&PL films have survived, Bates then says that many films "were planned that never got off the ground." Stating it this way diminishes the F&PL's accomplishment. According to Seltzer: "I know that at least 60 films were produced by the F&PL between 1931 and 1934, including two newreel series titled AMERICA TODAY and THE WORLD IN ACTION." It is also important to mention that many of these films were stored in vaults in Fort Lee, NJ, and were destroyed in fire.
5. Bates says that the F&PL was destroyed by dissention. They claim what dissention there was indicated the organization's democratic character and that larger forces, such as social, economic, and political changes in the U.S. and the capitalist world, changed the conditions for radical filmmaking. More specifically, Seltzer says that it ended "because it and its parent organization, the Workers International Relief, had served their purpose."
6. Seltzer objects to calling the Worker's International Relief "the Comintern's cultural wing."
7. They draw a sharp distinction between the Photo League and the F&PL and claim that Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn were never involved in the latter.
8. Joris Ivens wrote in to say that Frontier Films was not headed by Pare Lorentz, Willard Van Dyke and himself. He says Pare Lorentz had nothing to do with Frontier Films and that Willard Van Dyke was only loosely connected. He was

listed on the staff, but had little direct involvement. Ivens felt that mentioning him only as a supporter diminishes the tremendous impact his films had on radical filmmaking in the U.S. in the 1930s.

We appreciate the responses of Ivens, Platt and Seltzer and their continued willingness to share their important experiences in the service of radical filmmaking in the last 50 years.

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On a theory of "sources"

by Sam Brody

from *Jump Cut*, no. 33, Feb. 1988, pp. 111-113

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The following article has a curious history, which gives a sense of the peculiar ideological and personal rivalries of the "dirty thirties." Brody's "On a Theory of 'Sources'" was written in March, 1930 in letter form and originally sent to *Close Up* as a criticism of the "source" theory of Harry Alan Potamkin, the journal's U.S. correspondent and a respected critic on the Left. Briefly, Potamkin felt the need for cinema to attempt a deeper exploration of its subject matter so as to "get at the source of its content." The "source" of the contemporary Negro for example, was not to be found in his or her class standing but rather in the elaborate psycho-ethnographic background of African dances, rituals, folklore, etc. (see "The Aframerican Cinema" in *Close Up*, August 1929). It was Potamkin's position that "we are always what we were" and this "source" overdetermines other influences or situations. *Close Up* refused to print Brody's pugnacious but soundly Marxist reply. However, Brody remained on good enough terms with Potamkin to interview Eisenstein with him in May of 1930 in New York.

Brody then sent the article to *Experimental Cinema*. At that time he was an associate editor and Potamkin the New York correspondent of that journal. The editors, Lewis Jacobs, Seymour Stern and David Platt, asked Potamkin to reply to Brody in the form of a critical discussion. Potamkin, for whatever reason, refused the assignment but the editors assured him that this would not affect his relations with the magazine. Soon afterwards however, Potamkin resigned from *Experimental Cinema*, and in the November, 1930 issue of *Close Up*, he delivered a scathing attack against his former associates, calling their aspirations "a malodor which is even worse than the stench of the west coast marshes." Somewhat perplexed by all this intrigue and venom directed towards them, Jacobs, Stern and Platt went ahead and printed Brody's article in early 1931 (*Experimental Cinema* Vol. 1, No. 3). *Experimental Cinema* and *Close Up* remained on unfriendly terms for a couple of years only to reunite in mid-1933 when the affair over Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* exploded internationally.

— the Editors

Elie Faure presented us with a useful term when he invented the word "cinemetaphysics." In recent years there have arisen enterprising young cinema enthusiasts in a number of countries to whose writings and activities Faure's learned term applies to perfection. All these groups and individuals may be designated as "cinemetaphysicians," the word meaning those who, having emerged from some field — usually the literary — wherein they have failed to capture laurels, seek to heap upon the comparatively virgin field of the movie a sort of high-sounding witchcraft which awes the uninitiated and nauseates the wise.

It is the belief that Mr. Potamkin has taken his place in the ranks of this tendency that prompts me to write this article.

For well over a year he has consistently expounded in *Close-Up* a theory of "sources," which has so far remained unchallenged. The deeply fallacious implications of this theory, or method, the originality of which its author is so proud, became alarmingly apparent when, commenting upon Vidor's HALLELUJAH! in an article entitled "The Aframerican Cinema," he developed the thesis that a study of African origins is indispensable for a correct filmic portrayal of the American Negro.

"... I want one (a Negro) as rich as the Negroes in Poirier's documents of Africa. *I am not interested primarily in verbal humor, in clowning nor in sociology.* (Emphasis mine — S.B.) I want cinema and I want cinema at its source. To be at its source, cinema must get at the source *of its contents*. The Negro is plastically interesting when he is most negroid. In films he will be plastically interesting only when the makers of the films know thoroughly the treatment of the Negro structure in the African plastic, when they know of the treatment of his movements in the ritual dances, like the dance of the circumcision, the Ganza..."

I might begin by asking Mr. Potamkin since when he has learned to dispense with sociology in his cinema, when only a few months ago, in an article published in *Monde* entitled "Cinema Americain," he wrote:

"Of all American films, the comic film is the most highly developed. This phenomenon is above all due to the impetus given to it by a foreigner, Charles Chaplin. The contribution of Chaplin to American films was on two planes: controlled stylistic expression, and *social reference or satire*" (Emphasis mine — S.B.).

Think of it! The "social reference" is here considered as one of the two main factors in the films of Chaplin, who Potamkin believes is largely responsible for the "tremendous development" of the American comedy.

Further in the same article, its author recommends as a "source" for the present-day American cinema, Sidney Drew, an early comedian "who introduced the satire of servants of the petty-bourgeoisie into the American movies."^[1] And again: "CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT, a broad and marvelous satire on the high American bourgeoisie... (!)" Potamkin points out in that same article that in order to perfect the "essence of its themes" the American cinema must refer back to its early history which he claims is replete with sociologically significant subjects. (What are "sociologically significant subjects," Mr. Potamkin?)

Even if the source theory be conceded, why this ardent clamor for reference to the sociological film as an American source and at the same time the assertion, "I am not interested primarily in ... sociology," when possible sources for Negro cinema are considered? Am I to accept this as a new brand of *discrimination*?

I want Potamkin to inform me how he would go about the matter of making a film on the American Negro without consideration for the socio-political motive that underlies every phase of Negro life in the United States. Mind you, I am not asking for a thesis, but consider the work of the Russians whose praise he has sung so loudly. There is great cinema because there is real insight into its only important source, the dialectic movements of the social organism and its motor: the class struggle.

If it is Negro plastic he is after, he and that only, (are you not diving headlong into the polluted waters of "art-for-art's-sake," Potamkin?) then Potamkin is deeply mistaken when he asks for a study of "Negro structure in the African plastic..." *Capitalist America has created a new Negro who in virtue of his position in the American social structure is as far removed from his African origin as his so-called "white-nordic superiors" are from theirs.* Read Prof. Reuter's essay on the subject, and you will learn that even in the sphere of plastic we have nothing to find at the African source. No, Mr. Potamkin, we "are" *not* "always what we were"; this is a vulgar and unscientific concept. The Negro of 1930 is *not* (even physiologically, take note!) what he was in 1870. In sixty years the black population of the United States has become so transformed that official figures place one third of its total in the mulatto group. The ratio of this transformation is at the present time so great that within fifty years Potamkin's "wooly, tall, broad-nosed and deep-voiced" Negro may be somewhat of a rarity in America. The assimilative process goes on despite the fact that the American ruling-class is segregating the Negro worker and pitting his white class brother against him. The inescapable fact that a white bourgeoisie exploits both the Negro and white worker is the determinant.[2] *The class issue governs above everything else.*

The almost complete metamorphosis of the Negro on American soil in a comparatively short historical period is the most instructive and essential feature to consider in any approach of the problem. While an investigation of origins can have great value both historically and in this case also anthropologically, it cannot, in the instance of the American Negro, bring us one step closer to the revelation of the laws that govern the history of the black man in capitalist America. "Aframerican" is obviously a fallacy.

The conception of "sources" in this case can only lead us back to the O'Nealian philosophy so slickly expounded in "The Emperor Jones" that even Potamkin, by his own admission, was able to swallow it whole. "We are always what we were." "Emperor Jones" says as much: Only a thin veneer separates the American Negro from his African origin (read "source"), and under primitive conditions he will revert to the fears, hysteria and superstitions of his tribal forefathers.

How strange these fairy-tales must seem to the Negroes in the steel-mills of Pittsburgh, the packing-houses of Chicago, and the coal-pits of Pennsylvania! Hollywood would rather go back to all the "sources" in the world than film the real American Negro. Any documentary film on the life of the American Negro would

pack more tragedy per foot of negative than a thousand falsehoods like HALLELUJAH! (But Hollywood is the monster-filter of capitalism through which is sifted American reality, and that is why we cannot expect it to give us the truth about Black America in its films.)

Giovannitti's lines come to my mind:

"I call you to the bar of the dawn to give witness if this is not what they do in America when they wake up men at midnight to hang them until they're dead."

The Negro on the screen! What a vision! I want to take Potamkin by the hand and lead him to the hell-holes of Georgia and Alabama where "they wake up men at midnight to hang them until they're dead" ... I want to guide him through the slums of Harlem where black babes die by the score in pest-infested tenements. I want to show him *the twelve million* that King Vidor will never dare to approach. Let him then speak to me of "sources," and the "dance of the circumcision."

The whole recent discovery of the Negro in art bears the imprint of Potamkin's "source" ideology. The discovery was made by *respectable* whites who do not understand the modern American Negro and who beneath their worship of spirituals, jazz and African sculpture, hide a deeply traditional class contempt for him.

Van Vechten in literature, Covarrubias in art, and now Vidor in the film! Never mind the *yaller* girl. Let us even forget the cast recruited in cabarets to interpret Southern cotton-pickers, and the "Negro" songs composed by Irving Berlin. Has not Vidor told us about "the remarkable emotional nature of the Negro"? What is this atavistic color that permeates the entire film, if not a vulgar "source" philosophy? Remember for a moment the fraudulent baptismal scene, the stagey and exaggerated revival meeting, the emphasis on the hysterical and the primitive in every move of the characters.

HALLELUJAH! is bad cinema because its director attempted to substitute the white bourgeois lie about the Negro's mystico-religious and hysterical nature for the proletarian reality of the Negro as a doubly exploited member of the American working class. Neither the most thorough study of Poirier's films nor the closest scrutiny of African primitive art forms could have helped Mr. Vidor to give us a better document than what he has offered us in HALLELUJAH! The result might have been a more pretentious but hardly a better film.

Sociological implications can never be avoided, no matter how esthetically disinterested either a novel, a play or a film may be. Viewed in this light HALLELUJAH! is as spurious as ABIE'S IRISH ROSE. Unless one is working with purely abstract forms, this cannot be escaped. The construction of any concrete theme in art in which human material is involved strictly implies the drawing up of definite social relationships as a prerequisite.

Obviously, all this is very elementary. But Mr. Potamkin has skipped over these basic considerations into an impossible position where an esthetically abstracted Negro essence is the film has become the thing for him. And that is the reason why, in one of his perennial quarrels with Gilbert Seldes, after two pages of trifling on

technicalities, it was only in passing that he found it necessary to mention... "the thematic false-rendering in the narration" of HALLELUJAH!

If we investigate Potamkin's application of the source theory to the Jew in the film, we find the same serious fallacy repeated. "...the importance of the Jewish physiognomy, like the Negro, an unexploited cinema plastic material, the singularity of the intensive Jewish gestures, and most outstanding, the Yiddish and Hebrew utterances as the material of the sonal film."

In the case of the Jew, Potamkin has been a little less specific and also a little less analytical of the matter. Try to go back to Jewish "sources" and you get as a result a most colorful mixture of almost every "source" in the world. May I again take the liberty to refer H.A.P. to a *scientific* source? Read the investigation by Karl Kautsky entitled, *Are the Jews A Race?* and you will discover that the modern Jew is even further from his sources than the American Negro. The Jew-type that you have in mind is vanishing from the earth even faster than the "wooly, broad-nosed Negro" is disappearing from the American scene. Kautsky has pushed his research so far as to prove conclusively that even the legendary Jewish proboscis is now only a memory. Rather sad for the Jewish-plastic enthusiasts, but a fact nevertheless.

A very interesting point. In his article on the Jew as movie-subject, Mr. Potamkin makes mention of almost every Yiddish film ever produced. Every gone-and-forgotten attempt is brought up to find its place in the scheme of the investigation. *Not a single word is mentioned about the film, which, its technical shortcomings notwithstanding, is in every respect the greatest one of the Jew ever made.* I have in mind the Soviet production entitled SEEDS OF FREEDOM. It is a film in which is portrayed the struggle of the younger Russian-Jewish generation against the conservative background of Yiddish orthodoxy. It is a dramatization of the birth of a new Jew who is beginning to shed the fetters of all his "sources" to merge with his advanced (revolutionary) class surroundings. In Hirsch Lekker, the hero, we see symbolized the emergency of the Jewish worker who is being remade by his social milieu.

And I know that Potamkin has seen SEEDS OF FREEDOM.

The consideration of cinematic plastic by no means becomes a minor one simply because a prototype at the "source" cannot serve our purpose. On the contrary, new structures, new gestures, new atmospheres, new forms beckon the real artist.

Unlike Mr. McPherson, editor of *Close Up*, I am of the opinion that the cinema needs *more* and not *less* theory. But let us learn to distinguish between correct theory and the eclectic humbug which results from attempts to be original at all costs. Excluding isolated and individual contributions of value to the theory and esthetics of the cinema, we may safely say that only the Russians have created a scientific system in theory which has fully proven its value in practice. This theory must be deepened and enriched with our further investigations and experiences in the cinematic field, but the creator of misleading theoretical concepts is as criminal as "the geographer who would draw up false maps for navigators." The mental gymnastics of the French bourgeois cinema esthetes gall me as much as pragmatic America's contempt for all theory. More clarity and less confusion! Less phrases and more science!

In the last year there has become noticeable a change of heart in their former attitude towards the Russian film on the part of many bourgeois intellectual cinema circles throughout the world. Some are complaining of "too much theory." A French bourgeois critic, formerly friendly to Russian films, recently wrote about his weariness of the Soviet *kino*. Another French cineaste has spoken of his disgust while emphasizing what he terms "the falsehood of the Russians." (Rene Clair). The French cinema world actively boycotted Eisenstein during his stay in Paris. And, in America.

Potamkin has already said: "I do not think the Russian kino has as yet found a method that suits its profound material ... the Russian films had better find a new method..."[3]

This was said by one who only a short time ago devoted whole articles in praise of the "old method." And take note of the almost threatening "had better." I think I can detect more sincerity in Selde's "technical trick" formulation.

I'll wait and see

Paris, March 1930.

NOTES

1. On this point a young Hollywood critic has the following to say: "Potamkin's mention of an insignificant bourgeois actor, forgotten today even by his former admirers, Sidney Drew, is an affectation that is typical of Potamkin's writing of the last year. Who was Drew, anyway? A thousand others also satirized the servants of the petty-bourgeoisie. This type of light, gay, chuckling satire is of no more significance to the type of satire that the servants of the bourgeoisie require of film-creators than the humor of Will Rogers is like the humor of a cartoon in the *Daily Worker*. It is affectations of this nature that make Potamkin's writings sterile, sophisticated to the point of nauseous glibness ... He is so anxious to show that he knows every Tom, Dick and Harry that has ever appeared before a camera or that ever ground out a six-reel piece of kitsch, that he misses the vital essence of his material."

2. This does not mean, of course, that the Negro is not faced with special problems within the working class — problems which necessitate new means of combat as part of the proletariat's broader revolutionary struggle. Lynching, for instance, is obviously a part of the oppression of Negroes as a race.

There is a bourgeois school of thought that denies the existence of a "Negro problem" on the ground that assimilation will eventually eliminate the Negro from the American social scene. This is a reactionary evasion of a sore in the capitalist system.

The fact that the Negro is changing through assimilation does not mean that he is not now the most exploited member of the American working class.

Both the "source" theory and that of "eventual assimilation" are therefore reactionary.

The object of this article is to show that in dealing with the Negro as subject-matter

for the film, Potamkin has merely reversed an old bourgeois "idea" into another just as counterrevolutionary. Instead of evading the issue by claiming a "natural" solution in some distant future, he has escaped to Africa. Between these two theories, the oppressed American Negro worker remains suspended in mid-air between his past and his future.

3. *New Masses*. New York, December 1929.

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John Howard Lawson: scriptwriter

by Peter Bates

from *Jump Cut*, no. 33, Feb. 1988, pp. 114-115

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The Left Side of Paradise: The Screenwriting of John Howard Lawson
by Gary Carr. Ann Arbor. UMI Research Press. \$34.95.

In his unpublished autobiography, Hollywood Ten screenwriter John Howard Lawson said: "MGM's world was really Kafka's America [sic], as mad as that." He couldn't have come up with a better metaphor of Thalberg and Mayer's wild fairyland filled with more demons than sprites, the only place where "miracles" could still happen. For only in Hollywood could a young writer be assigned the talking sequence for Garbo and Gilbert in *FLESH AND THE DEVIL*, not because of his feel for plot, but because he could weave snappy dialogue into any script. In those early years with MGM and RKO, Lawson rarely wrote with any conviction, but like his colleagues he saw himself as a craftsman hacking out a commodity — sometimes maudlin, sometimes tough and colorful, whatever the honchos wanted.

A romantic radical, Lawson always tried to sneak social comment into what he called his "corny melodramas." In Cecil B. DeMille's *DYNAMITE*, Derk the coal miner tells upper class Cynthia "Those diamonds you have on your wrist were coal ... They'll be bringing it up long after you're gone." Speculates Carr: "[That] is as far as he [DeMille] will go in exploiting the topical theme of labor unrest." Most of the time Lawson felt so creatively shackled he began working on plays for Harold Clurman's left-wing Group Theater, often while he was writing under contract to a studio, a questionable but necessary activity. He treated Hollywood like an obsessive lover, resenting it, but refusing to stay away. In one of his best plays, *Success Story*, Sol, the young Jew who abandons his youthful idealism for mammon, kills himself when he cannot reconcile his capitalist life with his Jewish, revolutionary past. Carr skillfully contrasts the play with its later film version *SUCCESS AT ANY PRICE*. Not only does the movie "goy up" the play, it magnifies the role of a gangster who appears only peripherally. Worst of all, it reverses the ending, making it "happy": Joe (Sol) gets saved by the love of a good woman.

When Lawson did get credit, the press was rarely kind to him, calling his writing "surprisingly dull," claiming he failed to breathe life into the play *Success Story*. Even the left reproached him. The playwright's career was soundly thrashed by *New Masses* critic Mike Gold for "futilitarianism" and general ideological muddiness. Gold's "A Bourgeois Hamlet of Our Times," a masterpiece of stolid party hack writing, accused Lawson of refusing "to surrender his [liberal] sickness,

because it is a comfortable shelter against responsible action." While Lawson replied a week later, defending himself a bit more energetically than Carr lets on, the left-wing guilt sunk in and he earnestly strove to ideologically purify himself. He met with Earl Browder and joined the CPUSA. He covered the Scotsboro Boys trial for *The Daily Worker* and composed the agitprop play *Marching Song*. And he wrote BLOCKADE, a film that never mentions its Spanish Civil War setting, and managed to draw fire from everyone but the left.

Despite the film's oblique stance toward politics, the Spanish and Italian governments found that BLOCKADE contained so much "objectional material" that liberal producer Walter Wanger ran and got the scissors (he didn't cut much). Ironically, while most reviewers of magazines like *The New Republic* and *Variety* criticized this "spy melodrama" for "pulling its punches," *The Daily Worker* and *People's World Magazine* loved it, reading far beyond its anti-Franco message. Carr's interview with Lawson reveals the screenwriter's regret at not dealing more openly with contemporary politics, but shows he was pleased the anti-isolationist message came across so well.

Carr's work is often intriguing, but he misses chances to probe the ironies of Lawson's career. He notices that Columbia's Harry Cohn isn't even ruffled by Lawson's political commitment in the mid-thirties, then fails to contrast Cohn's sloppy attitude with the Hollywood Ten furor twelve years later, when Lawson was jailed for his CP and Screen Writer's Guild affiliations. Carr could have researched Cohn's reactions to the 1947 hearings. And why does he devote only two pages to post-1947, Lawson's prison and ghostwriting years? Couldn't he get Lawson to talk about them?

Carr briefly mentions Lawson's theoretical books like *Film in the Battle of Ideas* and *Theory and Technique of Screenwriting* [both republished in 1985 by Garland], but never analyzes or quotes them. Too bad. In these books Marxist critic Lawson gets tough, like Mike Gold. His attitude toward reformist films (but not his own) like HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY ("sentimental and unrealistic") and THE GRAPES OF WRATH ("negative and defeatist") is cursory, sometimes even picky.

Annoyingly, *The Left Side of Paradise* sometimes engages in graduate student exercises, like unraveling trends or recurring themes in the man's lifework. Carr names one the "Lawsonian archi-scene," which stands for the situating of two characters in a closed space where they experience self-realization, radicalization, and "regeneration through catastrophe." Carr traces this technique 20 years, up to SAHARA, where the Senegalese soldier and the Texan compare cultures while gathering water. This scene "forces the best qualities out of them." True, the scene is powerful. But does knowing the "archi-scene" device goes all the way back to Lawson's play *Roger Bloomer* (1923) help us understand how Lawson's work was formed, hindered, and ultimately halted?

The Left Side of Paradise is most moving when Carr talks of Lawson's confusion at juggling social issues with "melodrama," or when he shows the dynamics behind Lawson's conflicts with directors and U.S. left-wing cultural commissars. I commend Carr for dealing with the forgotten career of this screenwriter. Perhaps *The Left Side of Paradise* will draw publishers' attention to that lengthy, and neglected, Lawson autobiography.

Lastly, I would have liked to have seen a filmography in this book. I'm sorry, but this is a major oversight. Owners of this book should be eligible to send for an update page, a large "errata" sheet with summaries of Lawson's plays and films.

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JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

The last word Representing AIDS

by the editors

from *Jump Cut*, no. 33, Feb. 1988, pp. 116-117

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As our editorial statement in this issue of JUMP CUT, we present "Safe Sex Guideline," by Jan Grover. We are also reproducing some safer sex comics distributed by Gay Men's Health Crisis, comics denounced in Congress by right-wing senator Jesse Helms. How AIDS gets represented is important to consider. On the one hand, the representation of AIDS has always been an ideological issue, reinforcing (or challenging) dominant power structures. Furthermore, it is a media issue about who controls the representation of a minority group, especially in a time of crisis.

Second, we wish to emphasize that only sexual practices, not categories of people, are "high risk." The risk associated with those practices can be diminished. But people must cease to yearn for a pre-AIDS utopian past, where the sexually active could look for uninfected partners so that both could assume they were in a state of non-risk. Rather (if not in a mutually monogamous relation with the same person for at least ten years who has not used intravenous drugs), we must act as if all of us were infected, and we must prevent the mutual exchange of bodily fluids. As leftists who place a primacy on social responsibility, we would add that this "left" responsibility now includes using latex barriers such as condoms in sexual practice.

Individuals create a self-representation, in regard to AIDS, and this internalized representation has great consequence in mutual sexual relations. For example, here are two common scenarios. One, a sexual partner says, "I want (me or you) to use condoms since neither you nor I know if either of us might be a carrier of AIDS." No burden of "proof" such as testing is laid on either. In the second scenario, a man says, "I don't want to use a condom," or a woman is afraid of rejection if she demands this of a man; both of them then have to act on "faith" as if they will not be infected with AIDS through their mutual contact — this is a search for an utopian pre-AIDS past, and it is socially and politically irresponsible.

IDEOLOGICAL MODES OF REPRESENTATION

Often in JUMP CUT, articles analyze how the dominant media creates and perpetuates ideological modes of representation that serve the interests of the ruling class, especially white middleclass men. Representing AIDS is a class issue, and such representations, in fact, vary according to class and so are enacted

institutionally in different material ways.

To take an example, AIDS is dealt with differently in elite colleges and universities than it is in state and Catholic schools. In the first, in an elite private university serving the children of the ruling class, you will find condoms sold in both men's and women's bathrooms in public spaces such as student unions. The student health service distributes condoms free in many men's and women's dorms; in the dorms, the university staff conducts ongoing education about safe/safer sexual practices.

In many state schools, for political reasons, and in most Catholic schools, for religious reasons, the students encounter a much greater silence around AIDS, and the official discourse is more likely to "blame" and advise avoiding gays rather than frankly discuss the range of sexual practices. An anti-sex abstinence is officially urged. State and religious schools serve more students from the working class, and AIDS education is both more ideological and more restricted there.

CREATION OF THE OTHER

One function of representations made by the dominant media is to create a category of Others, often sexually threatening and often scapegoats. For the dominant class to know some group as the Bad Other is to affirm its own identity and social control. As anthropologist Mary Douglas pointed out, these Others are seen to exist on the "boundaries" of ordered society, and their threat to society is characteristically described in terms of sexual aberrance. Never has this pattern of representation been more obvious than now in the AIDS crisis. It is most obvious in the new set of heterosexual "advice" books which tell readers how to find a pool of pure, uninfected partners.

Dominant representations of high risk groups — gay men, Africans, intravenous drug users, black and hispanic adolescents in large urban areas — and the consequent social legislation based on those representations would condemn these groups to genocide. For example, the political right, out of a self-righteous sense of disgust, proclaims that abstinence is the solution and legislates that the government fund no education about safer sexual practices or about hygienic IV drug use.

We know from the case of women's accessibility to abortion that the right enforces its principles about sexuality only among the poor. In this case, the right-wing influence on government funding means that AIDS information and condoms are not distributed in prisons; IV drug users do not learn how to clean their drug works with household bleach; and the mentally retarded do not see videotapes with condoms placed on erect human penises although they need such graphically explicit images for instruction about safer sex. When people in these groups die in large numbers from AIDS, the right will assume they deserved it.

GAY MEN AND LESBIANS UNITE

The gay men's community and the lesbian community have united with strong bonds because of the massive homophobia that has resulted from how AIDS is generally represented. The gay men's community has provided not only a model for AIDS education but proof that it works — that education can change behavior. The

rate of AIDS infection in the gay community has stabilized, not increased, as the gay community at large has moved from an ethos of sexual liberation to one of responsibility for others.

Within the gay community, this sense of responsibility has often resulted in an individual readiness to get openly angry at and strongly criticize friends who still engage in high-risk sexual practices. And this may also be a model for society at large — the capacity to get angry at friends for not reducing risk.

Furthermore, the national political organization of the gay and lesbian community rivals that of the anti-Vietnam-war movement: The Gay and Lesbian March on Washington in October rivals the biggest antiwar demonstrations in D.C., both in size and militancy. It was precisely this gay and lesbian mobilization and its degree of political organization that sparked a backlash in the Senate, tangibly about AIDS education, but in a larger sense, revealing the government's fear of visible, organized homosexuals.

The gay community has proven that behavioral change is what is needed to combat AIDS. All AIDS education needs to offer a complete and graphic description of the range of sexual practices, and an indication of how those practices can be modified to prevent an exchange of bodily fluids.

Since we on JUMP CUT believe that education is more important than testing, we offer here a list of sexual practices, in alphabetical order, and how they can be practiced in a safer way. These practices are often a part of both gay and straight sexual orientations. The comics reprinted here represent another way of presenting information, using humor to disarm ("When you're sleeping with Ralph, you're sleeping with everyone he's ever slept with") or using the sexual language and iconography of a minority group in a "sex-positive" way so as to make safer sex more desirable to act upon.

Even as we write these words and present this information, we know the difference between how the media, JUMP CUT included, offer so much information and how it is that people may want to remember or use that information. Safe/safer sex comics play a role in helping people want to use this information. So may films and videotapes. So may our individual commitment to being responsible both for ourselves and for others. We see the need for an immediate change in everyone's sexual practice, and we hope these safe sex guidelines provide not only education but a personal incentive to change as well.

Safer sex guidelines and bibliography

by Jan Grover

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On Tuesday, October 14, 1987, two days after the National Lesbian and Gay March on Washington, U.S. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) waved a Gay Men's Health Crisis "safer sex" comic book around the Senate floor, denouncing its contents as "so obscene, so revolting," that he was too embarrassed to discuss it:

"I believe that if the American people saw these books, they would be on the verge of revolt." [1] [[open notes in new window](#)]

To fight this gay menace, Helms submitted an amendment to the FY 1988 omnibus appropriations bill. Amendment No. 956 would prohibit the federal Centers for Disease Control from making funds available to provide AIDS education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote, encourage, or condone homosexual sexual activities.

Under Helms' proposed amendment,

"Education, information, and prevention activities and materials paid for with funds appropriated under this Act shall emphasize—(1) abstinence from homosexual sexual activities." [2]

After very little debate, Helms' amendment passed on a roll-call vote, 94-2.

Helms had set the stage for his amendment weeks before introducing it by sending photocopies of a GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis, NYC) safer sex comic books to "about 15 or 20 Senators ... in a brown envelope marked 'Personal and Confidential, for Senator's Eyes Only'." He also brought a copy of the comic book to the White House to show to Reagan, who, according to Helms,

"opened the book, looked at a couple of pages, closed it up, and shook his head, and hit his desk with his fist." [3]

The upshot of this manly display of restraint in the face of GMHC's "pretense of AIDS education" was Helms' proposal to prevent federal CDC funds from being used for any form of safer sex or IV drug-use information to slow or prevent the passage of HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus) among populations that gave offence to Mr. Helms and Mr. Reagan. [4]

I bring up this episode because JUMP CUT has decided to publish a set of safer-sex guidelines in this issue, not least because the actions of a Jesse Helms in the U.S. and a Mary White House in Britain, along with the recent FCC regulations restricting "obscene" material on radio, threaten to make explicitly safe-sex guidelines tailored to specific populations impossible to circulate.[5]

We are also reprinting here one of the GMBC safer-sex comics that so offended two national leaders — the most-requested safer-sex material developed by any AIDS service organization in the world.[6] If the Administration has its way (*pace* Edwin Meese), such information will become increasingly more difficult to obtain.

There is already an increasing public confusion over what safe-sex guidelines might mean. For at least five years (1981-86), the concept of *safe* or *safer* sex was defined primarily by those who practiced it — gay and bisexual men who evolved a set of guidelines in cooperation with sympathetic members of the medical community experienced in treating gay men and people with AIDS.

Since the mainstream media "discovered" AIDS as a threat to the general population,[7] however, the usual range of self-appointed experts have emerged: pop figures like Art Ulene, M.D., *Today* show's resident OB/GYN, who has written *Safe Sex in a Dangerous World: Understanding and Coping with the Threat of AIDS*; sexologists like Helen Singer Kaplan, M.D., Ph.D., author of *The Real Truth about Women and AIDS: How to Eliminate the Risks Without Giving up Love and Sex*; journalists like Cris Norwood, author of *Advice for Life: A Woman's Guide to AIDS Risks and Prevention*; and, of course, politicians like Jesse Helms.[8]

Along the way, safer sex as theory and practice has become highly politicized, a field for argument for sexual puritans and adventurers, civil rights advocates of many stripes, anti- and pro-sex education groups. Fundamental to the contestations over safe/safer sex[9] is the fact that much about the HIV's transmission is still a matter of speculation rather than solid knowledge. What has *been made* of the comparative absence of grounded evidence, moreover, spits fairly evenly between the very pragmatic responses within gay communities, where safer sex carries with it the axiomatic assumptions that each person must behave sexually as if he/she *were infected* with HIV and the absolutist yearnings of conservative, heterosexual safer-sex advocates like Ulene, Kaplan and Norwood, who want above all to return to the *certainties* of a pre-AIDS world, when people could assume/act as if they were *not infected*.

The safer-sex guidelines developed within the gay communities, which are the ones I will outline below, begin with personal responsibility to prevent any possible transmission of HIV from oneself and to oneself from a (possibly or actually) infected partner. Practices based on this concept of responsibility entail the scarey if realistic assumption that one might indeed be infected. If followed, such practices render the need for "testing" for HIV antibody unnecessary, except insofar as it might affect one's medical treatment.

In contrast, the safer-sex guidelines developed by mainstream media/political AIDS experts are grounded in a search for a totally safe partner with who one can do "anything" (everything one's used to doing). Books and advice columns representing this position devote a lot of space to "estimat[ing] the likelihood that [a partner] is free of the AIDS virus." [10] As part of their conservative, black-and-

white view of sex in the age of AIDS, they may also make eloquent cases for abstinence in the absence of certainty:

"Truly 'safe sex' is an all-or-nothing thing. Sex is either 100% safe or it's not, even when it's 'almost safe.' If you can't find a safe partner, don't kid yourself into believing that there is a perfectly safe alternative — other than abstinence ... But no one talks about abstinence today. Judging from my mail, it was a somewhat surprised — but approving — *Today* show audience who heard me suggest that abstinence is a reasonable alternative in these dangerous times ... a choice that deserves serious consideration in the age of AIDS." [11]

When the quest for that rare, 10-years-monogamous-but-free-to-be-yours partner has failed, when abstinence cannot be enjoined, the conservatives call for HIV antibody testing — invariably characterized as the AIDS test — as the only reasonable solution to prevent getting or giving the virus. Chris Norwood, in *Advice for Life*, even rallies enthusiasm for the prospect of antibody testing, seeing it as an opportunity to prove one's fidelity to a sexual partner/ prospect:

"The bottom line, again, is that testing will relieve most people of a brutal worry, while giving them a good opportunity to be counseled about avoiding Aids risks in the future. *Why not go with him and get an HIV test yourself?*" [12]

What is conspicuously lacking in the zeal these writers summon for antibody testing is any discussion of what effects such testing may have in altering one's own or other people's behavior: it's as if the very idea of testing were somehow a sufficient anodyne to current cares. Helms, Kaplan and Ulene, for example see widespread testing as both imminent and desirable, but they're much vaguer about what should be done with those found antibody-positive. It's as if those people might disappear from the social and sexual landscape, leaving the playing fields to the general population, the heterosexual and uninfected, who could then return to the joys of an eros untroubled by mortality.

Believing that personal responsibility begins not in undergoing an antibody test, [13] but in altering one's sexual behavior to render it safe, JUMP CUT offers these guidelines:

SAFER SEX FOR EVERYBODY

Though conservative safer-sex guidelines neglect to make this important connection, let me emphasize that there is no significant distinction between the sexual practices of gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual men and women. It is not any practice *per se* that causes transmission of the HIV; it is the infectious status of one or more of the partners. Therefore, the goal of safer-sex is to eliminate transmission, no matter what the practice.

Realistically, however, some sexual practices are more difficult to perform without risking the possibility of the virus being inoculated into one's partner. This is where the concept of "high-risk practices" comes in (NOT "high-risk partners" — our goal is to think of all of us as this). Unprotected fisting or anal-receptive intercourse, for example, provide the HIV, if present, with abundant opportunity to reach the T-4

leukocytes for which the virus has an affinity. If, however, anal intercourse is performed with a condom, if fisting is done with a calf-birthing glove, then the practices move from "high-risk" to "low-risk." Note, however, that they still carry *some* risk.

SAFER-SEX GUIDELINES

Rather than balkanizing sexual practices as if there were distinctly safe and unsafe practices — there are several excellent texts that take this approach[14] — I intend listing them continuously, together with the risks currently thought to be associated with them and the modifications that are thought to make them safer. Completely "dry" sex (i.e., abstention, Mary five-fingers, massage, hugging, dry kissing), as most people have heard by now, do not offer much of a likelihood for HIV transmission — but neither do they stimulate widespread enthusiasm. Throughout these guidelines, our assumption is that all partners are presuming that they are infected with HIV and/or are responsible enough to behave as if they are.

ANAL DOUCHING Do it all you want, but use your own equipment exclusively. Never share hoses or tips with partners. Any anal sex (intercourse, fisting) following douching *must include barrier protection*.

ANAL INTERCOURSE The incidence of HIV antibody among men having only receptive anal intercourse is magnitudes higher than it is among men only having insertive anal intercourse, according to those studies where distinctions could be made about men who performed anal sex exclusively one way or the other (studies of women who perform exclusively anal-receptive sex have not been done). Unprotected anal intercourse is a very high-risk activity. The risk is reduced if the partner who inserts wears a condom *properly*, but it is not risk-free unless both partners are uninfected. For conservative safe sex advocates, this is sufficient reason to never perform it — but this attitude is also colored in many cases by the "unnaturalness" they attribute to sodomy.

CUNNILINGUS/GOING DOWN (on a woman) The genital and cervical secretions of infected women may contain HIV, so theoretically, it is possible to transmit the virus by going down on an infected female partner. However, the amount of virus in a given quantity of these secretions is many orders smaller than in blood, so, unless blood from menstruation or other cause is present, the risk is thought to be low. Given the many *if's*, however — presence of blood, presence of undetected sores in the mouth or on the lips of the other partner — the lowest risk is presented by putting a barrier between the genitals and the partner's mouth. *Dental dams* are thin pieces of latex, thicker than condoms, that can be used as such a bather. They can be sewn into crotchless underpants or held in place by either partner during oral sex. Dental dams can be purchased at dental-supply stores and, in larger cities, in drug stores.

FELLATIO/SUCKING/GOING DOWN (on a man) Again, the studies that have been done of men whose sexual practice is confined to sucking conclude that this is a far less-risky activity than, e.g., anal-receptive sex. However, the possibility of undetected sores or cuts on either the penis of one or the mouth and lips of the other partner make it important for the inserter to wear a condom, withdraw carefully when he comes, and not re-use the condom.

FISTING (anus or vagina) Any part of you that goes inside a partner should be protected before it heads home. In the case of anal fisting, latex or rubber calf-birthing gloves, which cover the arm to the elbows, provide the necessary barrier. These can be purchased at veterinary supply stores and should be lavishly lubed with a water-soluble lubricant like KY. In the case of vaginal fisting, latex examination gloves (medical supply stores and some drug stores) should be used, again with sufficient lubricant to prevent trauma to the vaginal walls. *Fisting without barriers* is high-risk sex because of the possibility of breaks in the skin surface of the fistee's hand and arm and in the mucous membrane surfaces of his or her partner through which the HIV could penetrate.

FRENCH KISSING/DEEP KISSING The HIV is present in low concentrations in the saliva of some infected people, so deep kissing carries some risk. The risk is clearly magnified if either partner has sores or cuts on the lips or in the mouth. If you're not going to give up deep kissing completely, the best solution here is to get to know your own mouth — feel around it, look inside it, smell your own breath, know whether or not you're likely to have broken areas in your mouth through which the virus could be transmitted.

PIERCING/KNIVES Do not share needles, scalpels, or knives with your partners.

RIMMING Oral/anal contact, for all the reasons that anal intercourse is high-risk, is also high-risk. It's also a great source for other STD infections like herpes, genital warts, amebas, so there are a number of good reasons to protect yourself with a barrier when performing it. The trusty dental dam comes into play here — stretch it across the anus before rimming.

SCAT The HIV has been found in shit, so if you play around with it, you'll need to keep it out of your orifices — mouth, eyes, ears, etc. — and know your body's condition well enough to be sure that there are no other points of entry. Intact skin is a highly effective barrier against the HIV, but if you have open cuts, dermatitis (acne, eczema), or sores, be sure to cover them with bandaids or other barriers before scatting.

SEX TOYS Don't share dildos, cock rings, ass plugs, benwa balls, whips, or other sex toys that come into contact with your own blood, genital, or anal secretions.

VAGINAL INTERCOURSE Women can become infected through vaginal intercourse, and men can become infected by an infected woman. Women should use nonoxynol spermicide in their vaginas in addition to demanding that their male partners use latex condoms. There is no laboratory evidence that the HIV can penetrate natural (membrane) condoms, which many men prefer because of their thinness, but hepatitis B virus can penetrate natural condoms in laboratory tests, so it's better to use latex as a broader protection.

WATER SPORTS The HIV has been found in the urine of some infected people, so use the same precautions you would with *SCAT* (see above).

NOTES

1. But that's not all: "Oh, boy," said Mr. Helms. "No wonder we have such a stupendous Federal debt." (GMHC received \$674,679 over a two-year period.)

2. *Congressional Record*, October 14, 1987, p. S14211.

3. Helms, *ibid*, p. S14203.

4. Helms, *ibid*. p. S14204: "We have got to call a spade a spade and a perverted human being a perverted human being ... Every AIDS case can be traced back to a homosexual act"

5. In Britain, the 1984 passage of the bill popularly known as the "Video Nasties" bill resulted in Thatcher's administration establishing a censorship board answerable to no one but the Home Secretary (an appointee) to scrutinize all videos offered for consumer/home sale or rental in Britain. This board publishes no guidelines and unlike the national film boards of the U.S. and Britain does not suggest or accept cuts in order to make offending videos acceptable. Part of the fallout of the Video Recording Bill is that safe-sex videos like Gay Men's Health Crisis' CHANCE OF A LIFETIME (1985) cannot be imported into Britain legally, nor could similarly sexually explicit videotapes be made for distribution in Britain. Cf. Martin Barker, ed., *The Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Media* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

Simon Watney, author of *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media* (London and Minneapolis: Methuen and the U. of Minnesota Press, 1987), notes that passage of the Video Recording Bill produced the paradox of a Parliamentary committee having to get a copy of CHANCE OF A LIFETIME smuggled into Britain in a diplomatic pouch in order to the committee to view it.

6. Information provided by Joey Leonte, Director of GMHC Publications, in conversation with the author, April, 1986. The "erotic comic books," as Leonte describes them, were devised for a specific use: they were and are handed out in bars by "bar fairies" — GMHC volunteers who go to gay bars to make safer-sex information available. Based on heterosexual porn comics of the 1920s and 1930s, the 8-page books are designed to make safer sex both hot and funny. Their small size encourages bar-goers to stick them in their back pockets. According to Leonte, in a discussion of the comics on GMHC's Manhattan cable program *Outreach* in 1985, all of the artwork was donated by well-known gay artists.

Jesse Helms, of course, based his October 14, 1987, Senate tirade on the contention that such materials *were perhaps* developed with federal funds, although in the course of his monologue, he conceded that GMHC's safer-sex comics were *not* produced with federal dollars. But that simple fact is largely irrelevant to his long-range goal — to see that all approaches to AIDS education and prevention that offend his sensibility are simply written out of history, much as his allies in the current Southern Baptist Conference are determined to see pluralism excluded from their faith.

7. See my "AIDS: Keywords," in the forthcoming *October* (Winter, 1987-88), where I identify a number of terms whose meaning has shifted to accommodate the realities and fictions surrounding AIDS.

8. I single out Ulene's, Kaplan's, and Norwood's books because they were all published in 1987, purport to be guides to prevention, and are products of major

U.S. publishers — Vintage/Random House, Fireside/Simon & Schuster, and Pantheon/Random House, respectively.

9. The term "safe sex" was coined while the HIV was still believed to be found only in blood and semen. Now that the HIV has been isolated from a far wider variety of human fluids — e.g., saliva, joint fluid, tears, urine, milk — it has become more realistic to speak of "safer sex," since the exchange of *any* fluids seems to carry some possibility of HIV transmission where one or more partners is infected.

10. Art Ulene, *Safe Sex in a Dangerous World* (NY: Vintage, 1987), p. 33. See especially the "questions you should ask to help determine just how risky your partner is for the AIDS virus" (pp. 34-5), hypothetical cases to test your assessing savvy (pp. 39-53), and table for "Estimating A Sex Partner's Risk for AIDS," (pp. 64-5). Similar sentiments appear in Helen Singer Kaplan's *The Real Truth about Women and AIDS*.

11. Ulene, pp. 31-2. It goes without saying that this is also the position taken by, variously, Jesse Helms, Ronald Reagan, William Bennett, and other newly-coined Administration experts on the importance of sexual repression to battling AIDS.

12. Norwood, *Advice for Life* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 58. Norwood also suggests that one couch one's queries to a potential (male) lover in a "non-threatening way" — which includes verbal assurances that any homosexual activities on the partner's part must have been someone else's fault. "Most people," she advises women to state, "don't fully understand the risks. They think you just have to be gay or an addict. *But even a guy who shot up drugs a few times or got seduced by some guy when he was a teenager might have a small risk*" (p. 57).

13. Norwood: "...there are already signs ... that more and more people consider testing a personal responsibility" (p. 58). The "signs" of *personal responsibility* that Norwood reads are legislative proposals (like Helms'? Like California State Senator Doolittle's draconian proposals?) and increased demand at test sites.

14. See, for example, Cindy Patton's excellent *Making It: A Woman's Guide to Sex in the Age of AIDS* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1987), and Diane Richardson's equally fine British reader, *Women and the AIDS Crisis* (London: Pandora Press, 1987).

Safer sex suggested reading

by Jan Grover

Many of the most recently published AIDS titles provide a deeply conservative sort of advice and social/political content. If you want to see how AIDS education can be constructed to ignore gays and IV drug users and to emphasize pie-in-the-sky celibacy or monogamy — a return to "time-proven values," start with the texts we have quoted above. You won't find these or similar texts listed below.

If, however, you want to see safe-sex guidelines embedded in a political analysis of AIDS and studies focusing on the politics of AIDS *per se*, then we suggest the

following as good places to begin:

Michael Callen, ed. *Surviving and Thriving with AIDS: Hints for the Newly Diagnosed*. New York. People with AIDS Coalition, 1987. (Available through National AIDS Network, 1012 14th Street, NW #601, Washington, DC 20005). A 146-page anthology of pieces by people with AIDS covering medical, social, sexual, political, and spiritual aspects of living with AIDS. The photographs challenge the media's conventional depictions of "victims"-staring-out-the-window-at-life-going-by. \$425.

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME (42 mm, video, Gay Men's Health Crisis/Publications, Box 274, 132 W. 24th St., NYC 10011. (212) 807-7517), is a sexually explicit video depicting "different couple[s] involved in realistic socio-sexual situations which focus on safer sex thinking or practices. The video presents a variety of sexual possibilities and preferences from intimacy between two lovers to group sex." Sex-positive and framed from within and to gay communities.

Nancy Krieger and Rose Appleman. *The Politics of AIDS*. Oakland. Frontline Pamphlets, 1986 (P.O. Box 2729, Oakland, CA, 94602). A brief (60 pp), perceptive analysis of public-health, legislative, and social responses to AIDS in the U.S. at the national and local levels. Puts government studies and data to progressive use and includes safe sex and "clean works" guidelines. \$4.00.

BettyClare [sic] Moffatt, Judith Spiegel, Steve Parrish, Michael Helmquist, eds. *AIDS: A Self Care Manual*. Los Angeles. AIDS Project LA/BIS Press, 1987. A slick, comprehensive manual on living with AIDS. \$12.95.

Cindy Patton, *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS*. Boston. South End Press, 1985. Anecdotal material that is a bit dated now, but remains the best analysis of the politics of AIDS in the U.S. \$9.00.

Cindy Patton and Janis Kelly. *Making it: A Woman's Guide to Sex in the Age of AIDS*. Illustrations by Alison Bechdel. Ithaca. Firebrand Books, 1987. Succinct, exhaustive, smart safe-sex manual in English and Spanish. \$3.95.

"Facing AIDS," a special issue of *Radical America*, 20:6 (1987). Includes articles on medical models of AIDS and the biases built into them; the economics of the AIDS crisis; Latinas and AIDS; antibody testing in black communities; and other important AIDS issues. \$3.95.

Diane Richardson. *Women and the AIDS Crisis*. London. Pandora Press, 1987 (soon to be released by Methuen). A politically and culturally savvy analysis of the many roles women are playing in the AIDS crisis — as people living with the syndrome, as lovers, parents, and care-providers of people with AIDS, and as people distinctively positioned amid the politics of AIDS — e.g., lesbians, Central Africans, IV drug users. Includes safe-sex guidelines.

Simon Watney. *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media*. London/Minneapolis. Methuen/University of Minn. Press, 1987. Shrewd analysis from a gay perspective of the depiction and consequences of AIDS in media, legislation, and censorship, primarily in Britain, though some discussion of the U.S. \$9.95.

Jeffrey Weeks. *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meaning, Myths and Modern Sexualities*. London. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. British gay cultural historian's analysis of the roles of sexology, sexologists, New Right, and others in defining historical sexualities; contemporary sexualities and the positioning of the AIDS crisis within them.

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